

Tzu Chi's Aid Efforts for Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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Before the start of the civil war, Syria's population was one of the youngest and most educated in the region, with nearly all Syrian children enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Now, nearly 12 million Syrians have been forced from their homes, half being children, causing more than 2 million school-aged children unable to attend schools. According to UNICEF, the decline in education for Syrian children has been the sharpest educational decline in the history of the region. In Turkey, UNHCR has registered and aided 1,700,000 Syrian refugees, but by 2015, the Turkish government will have an estimated number of 2.5 million Syrian refugees, 80% or more being women and children. This influx of refugees from not just Syria, but also neighboring countries such as Iraq, has further strained Turkey's economic and societal infrastructure.

To help alleviate the burden on host countries, NGOs, foreign governments, and the international community have mobilized to provide relief and aid; however, even nongovernmental support is becoming increasingly strained. However, NGOs and INGOs such as the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation (BTCF), or Tzu Chi, has and is continuing to contribute to the humanitarian aid efforts for Syrian refugees, conducting food and non-food item distributions and providing financial subsidies to the parents of school-aged children. From the experience-based recommendations of NGOs working on the ground, ones such as World Vision, "Refugees need food, clothing, health assistance, shelter, and basic household and hygiene items. They need reliable supplies of clean water, as well as sanitation facilities. They'll need warm clothing, heaters, and heating fuel to get through the coming winter months." Taking these recommendations into account, Tzu Chi's non-food item distributions include fuel, the organization's eco-blankets made from recycled PET bottles, and donated winter clothing. In October 2015, the organization has held several mid to large scale distributions, benefiting over 2,000 Syrian refugee families and individuals in Turkey. Since 2011, Tzu Chi has engaged in humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees living Turkey, providing cash/debit cards and food aid, benefitting more than 40,000 individuals as of June 2015.



The material aid and distributions is but a way to help provide for Syrian refugees's basic human needs; but there are still other needs that must be met, ones in the educational and psychosocial context. According to NGOs such as the Jesuit Relief Services (JRS) and aid workers on the ground, refugee students often face discrimination and bullying, often times segregated, having to attend schools at different hours and school sites from their Turkish peers, further, the many students who are not attending schools are, often times, the primary or even sole provider for their family. The struggles faced by refugees, most namely the school-aged children, may have deep, long-lasting, and damaging implications on their psychosocial and emotional well-being; recognizing this, Tzu Chi's aid work is developed around the basis of empowerment, dignity, and advocacy of integration.

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