

Turkey's Refugee Camps at the Dawn of Summer

By Javier Delgado Rivera



ABOVE: Curious Syrian and Iraqi refugee children in the Kahramanmaraş refugee camp inspect this journalist while younger ones keep playing, unimpressed by the presence of the camera. The large banner at the back features a distressed child facing an image of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Note the solar panels installed at the top of each container block: they are used to heat water and provide electricity to the households. RIGHT: Women and children shelter in the shade between their container units while laundry dries in the scorching summer sun above a broken sofa sitting outside a container block.

IN LATE JUNE, I visited some of the 23 camps that Turkey operates to provide shelter to almost 250,000 refugees, mostly Syrians fleeing the brutal war next door.

The Syrian conflict is one of the biggest tragedies of our time. Since the beginning of the fighting in March 2011, approximately half of the country's population (estimated at 22 million) has been forced to flee their homes. More than 5 million live as refugees in neighboring countries, and another 6.3 million are displaced within Syria.

Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, at 2.9 million (a figure that Ankara puts at 3.5 million), making it second only to the U.S. in contributions of humanitarian relief. Yet fewer than 10 percent of the refugees it hosts can be housed in camps. The vast majority of refugees are spread across Turkey's cities and towns, mainly in the provinces bordering Syria and in Istanbul, where half a million Syrians live.

These photos provide a glimpse of life in the two camps I visited, Kahramanmaraş and Osmaniye, located just a few kilometers from the border with war-torn Syria and home to some 24,000 and 10,000 people, respectively. ■

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PHOTOS JAVIER DELGADO RIVERA



ABOVE: Aerial views of the Kahramanmaraş temporary protection center in the morning and at night. Comprising 5,000 containers housing 18,519 Syrians and 5,368 Iraqis, this camp, one of 23 built and operated by Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD), has four schools, two mosques, warehouses, sports areas, first aid centers and a water treatment plant. Photos Courtesy AFAD.

Students in the Osmaniye camp receive Turkish lessons during the summer, after the regular school year has ended. "We want to prevent a lost generation," was the message frequently stated by the camp's leaders. Photo Javier Delgado Rivera



BELOW LEFT: Sitting in the thin shade projected by a container block, children in the Kahramanmaraş refugee camp smile and wave. The tarpaulin covering the containers helps cool off the interior of the living units and provides a degree of intimacy in the area between lodgings, which is used as a socializing space during the hot summer months. BELOW RIGHT: A well-stocked supermarket in Osmaniye camp would not be out of place in any American or European city. Each refugee receives 100 Turkish lira (around \$28) for food and personal items—not enough to include vegetables, meat or fish in their daily grocery shopping. Photos Javier Delgado Rivera

