

Macedonia: The Caring Hand of Support

BY MAJA VUCINIC

Since the start of 2015, more than one million migrants and refugees have arrived in Europe via the sea, trying to escape war, violence and persecution from their home countries. The Republic of Macedonia, located in the central Balkan Peninsula in Southeast Europe that borders Greece to the south and Serbia to the north, became one of the main crossing points for people travelling to Western European countries with hope for a better future.



Macedonia—the first stop in the Western Balkans

The vicious civil war in Syria, which is reaching its sixth year now, is the biggest driver of migration. Even though there are people who don't want to leave their homes in this country, the majority of Syria's residents decided to continue their life in a more peaceful place.

Unfortunately, facing inhuman living conditions, violence, and poverty is not only a reality for those living in Syria; many people from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Eritrea decide to leave their home countries too, for similar reasons. They are all now referred to as migrants and refugees, and they have only one thing in mind—to start a new life with their families, far away from where they once called "home."

Most of the refugees and migrants have moved to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, continuing their trip to Greece, Hungary, and Italy by boat and overland. The International Organization for Migra-

tion (IOM) estimated that more than 920,000 registered migrants arrived by sea in the period between January and November 2015. By the end of 2015, more than 844,000 migrants and refugees arrived in Greece from Turkey and more than 150,000 arrived in Italy from Libya across the Mediterranean Sea. Those headed for Greece travelled by sea from Turkey to the nearest Greek islands, such as Lesbos, Kos, Chios, and Samos.

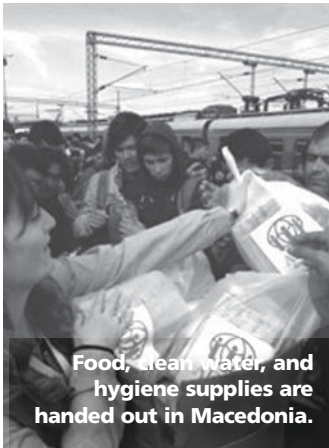
As soon as they reach Greece, migrants and refugees head towards Macedonia on their way to the Western European countries. According to government statistics, between June and December of 2015, there were nearly 383,000 refugees and migrants registered to enter Macedonia. Fifty-seven percent of them came from Syria, 24.4 percent came from Afghanistan, twelve percent from Iraq, and the rest came from Iran and Pakistan.

For many of them, traveling on unsafe ships and boats was a challenging, even horrifying, experience. In a desperate attempt to get to Europe, most of the migrants and refugees made it to the foreign coasts, but unfortunately, there are many who didn't. According to the latest information, it is estimated that there are more than 3,700 people who drowned, or went missing at sea, on the way to the European countries.

The ones that have made it to land are frightened, exhausted, and often starved. However, the thought of going back through the cold sea is more frightening than the long trip to the unknown. Once they refresh and regain their strength on the coast of Greece, they enter the territory of the Western Balkans, arriving in Macedonia.



The role of ADRA Macedonia in the migrant crisis



Food, clean water, and hygiene supplies are handed out in Macedonia.

According to the latest statistics, more than 900,000 migrants and refugees have entered Macedonia since January 2015. Considering Macedonia's total population is just 2,126,541 peo-

ple, it has been quite challenging to help and support such a large number of people. ADRA Macedonia has recruited a team of volunteers to be able to help as many people as possible at the Transit Centers in Tabanovce and Gevgelija. One of the major activities of the ADRA Macedonia team related to helping migrants and refugees is providing food and drinking water for the people as they arrive at the Transit Centers.

The ADRA team also purchases and distributes warm winter clothes such as jackets, gloves, warm socks, and winter hats, plus raincoats for the youngest, to keep them dry during the rainy days. Volunteers noticed a huge need for hygiene supplies, so now ADRA provides basic hygiene supplies for men, women and children, according to their needs—things like toothpaste and toothbrushes, soap, and feminine hygiene products for women. Baby-carriers are another popular item.

So far, ADRA has helped more than 8,000 people, providing more than 10,000 food items to refugees and migrants at the Transit Centers in Tabanovce and Gevgelija.

On the way to a better future—life stories of migrants passing through Macedonia

On their way to a peaceful life and better future, migrants have left almost everything behind: their homes, relatives, friends. But they have also left many sad memories and a fearful past. They have locked their beautiful memories somewhere deep into their hearts, somewhere safe. Now, all

they have is some food, clothes, and their loved ones, if they are lucky.

Most have an uncertainty about whether or not to trust complete strangers, as they pass through various counties, completely different than the one they come from.

Talal is one of those people who left his home country and now must rely upon the help and support of humanitarian organizations such as ADRA Macedonia. He comes from a faraway place that was once beautiful; a city that is one of the three biggest in Iraq—the city of Mosul. Mosul is located in the north of the state, near the Tigris River coast, about 400 km north of Baghdad. When the living conditions became unbearable, Talal decided to leave and start over somewhere else in the world, along with his wife and four children. The decision to leave the place they called home was more than tough, but it was necessary. The family decided to build a life from scratch somewhere safe, somewhere peaceful. Their final destination is Western Europe—Germany. Talal is now ready to try there, far away from his home, to create a new, happier future for his children.

While he shares his story unselfishly with the team of ADRA Macedonia, we ask him about his current needs, offering some food and winter gear items for him and his family. Then, just like people usually do when making new friends, we exchanged email addresses with a promise to stay in touch, hoping to hear from him soon and learn that he has managed to find a safe spot for his family. We hope to hear that they will soon be ready to start creating a happier future and more beautiful story with a happy ending.

The story of **Abdullah** is very similar to Talal's. He is one of the migrants who stop at the transit centers only when it's necessary to rest or refresh. He comes from Kandahar, Afghanistan, and is traveling with his child. Even though his home country faces somewhat different challenges compared to Iraq, the reason for leaving home is basically the same. Searching for peace, security and the opportunity for a better, more peaceful life is the essential motive for this man

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to leave the rest of the family, take one child with him, and start this long, exhausting trip to Europe on his own. While talking to Abdullah, we learned that part of his family is still in Kandahar, while some family members are already in Germany. He hopes to see the entire family together in one place soon, and hopes to build a home and create a better future for his dearest.

We exchanged email addresses with Abdullah also, and promised to keep in touch. We offered him some food and warm winter socks, gloves, hats, and scarves for him and for his child. He took the items that he needed the most, and decided to rest for a while before continuing his trip. Because this trip is a long one.

Mahmud comes from Syria. He is traveling with his wife, their two children and a friend. They are all passing through Macedonia, taking short breaks to refresh at the Transit Center Tabanovce. After offering them warm clothes and some food, we had a chance to talk with Mahmud for a while, and learn that he has chosen Germany as a final destination to settle, and the reason for taking this long and exhausting trip is the need for a peaceful environment and hope for a better future.

Hikam El Masri and **Bilamedin** are also coming from Syria. Hikam decided to take this tiring trip to Europe along with his wife and four children. He is also going to Germany, hoping to find a safe place to build a home for them. Even though he is ready to start a new life in another country,

he is still hoping that the current situation in Syria will change and that peace will replace violence. Bilamedin is another man determined to start anew, trying to build his life somewhere far from his home country. He has also chosen Germany for the final destination of this exhausting trip to Europe. Even though he decided to continue with his life somewhere abroad, in a foreign country, deep in his heart he hopes that someday things will change and that he will be able to come back home, to Syria, with his family.

Muhammad is a nineteen-year-old coming from a small city in Syria. He stated that he is very unhappy with the current situation in his country, especially the way it affected his life within the past few years. After his family experienced some very tough days while living in a small city in Syria, they decided to leave their country, and try to find peace somewhere in Europe. “I have never heard about ADRA, but I am very thankful to all the people in your team for everything you have done for us. I hope one day we will see each other again”; these are the words that Muhammad said to the volunteers of ADRA Macedonia, before continuing his trip towards Serbia.

Shakiba is one of the migrants who comes from Afghanistan and hopes to find better life conditions in Switzerland. Shakiba’s wish is to ensure a safe and peaceful environment and to see the entire family together.

A few days ago, while doing our regular activities in the Transit Centre Tabanovce, we noticed



Volunteers distribute baby carriers to ease the burden for refugee parents.

a young couple looking for a spot to rest. Our team representatives approached them offering food and non-food items, and tried to learn if there is anything more we can do for them, as we noticed that the young woman was pregnant and appeared pale and tired. They accepted the food and shared their life story with us:

We are a young couple from Afghanistan. I am twenty-seven and my wife is twenty-five years old. We decided to leave our country because it was very dangerous living there, especially with the fact that my wife is expecting a baby. We know that it is not easy when you leave everything behind, in hope to find a better and more peaceful place for us and our future children. We have never heard about your organization (ADRA Macedonia), but we are very thankful to you, because you sacrifice your time for all of us.

Future plans for supporting people in the migrant crisis in Macedonia

Sometimes, for people facing a hard time in their life, a friendly face, empathy and a helping hand can mean more than anything else. The smiles that we see on people's faces warm our hearts and give us even greater motivation to continue in our cause.

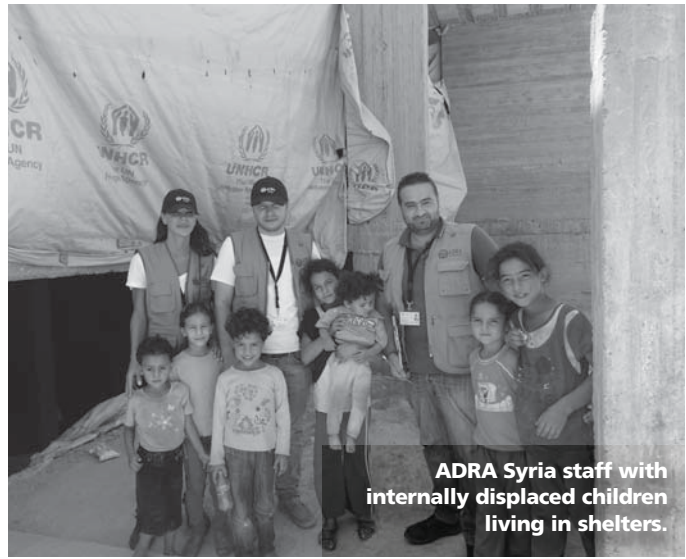
As much as we are aware of the fact that we have helped many people so far, in so many ways, we believe that there is so much more to do. Apart from finding ways to ensure financial means so we can provide more food and non-food items for the migrants and refugees crossing Macedonia, we are now focused on improving our service. We work on gathering more volunteers willing to actively participate in our activities on a daily basis.

In December 2015, the team of ADRA Macedonia visited the home of the great humanitarian and a famous Macedonian singer Esmā Redzepova, where we talked about the possibilities of cooperation during the migrant crisis. She was happy to join our team in the field and help the refugees. We believe that her engagement in our cause will motivate more people to contribute to helping these people whose lives were disturbed against their will, regardless if they will join ADRA or another organization, or they will help people individually, in their own way.

What is more important for us at the moment is to find a way to provide psychological and emotional support for migrants and refugees, especially for the youngest among them. The long road that these people are travelling is extremely stressful. They are constantly worried about their lives, as well as for the lives of their loved ones. Many families get separated and are not able to hear from each other for a long time. We have heard so many sad stories from families whose members were lost at sea. Others became victims of thieves along the way who took a part of the small amount of belongings that these people were able to take with them on this long journey.

All of the migrants and refugees are uncertain about their future. They are not sure if there will be enough food and clothes for the days to come. They are also worried about their health since they travel in bad weather conditions, especially now, during the cold winter days.

Therefore, we are making plans and strategies how to ease their emotional pain while we have a chance, during the time that we spend with them on their way to the next transit center. ■



ADRA Syria staff with internally displaced children living in shelters.

ADRA in the Middle East | BY

MEMORY COX, ADRA LEBANON, KURDISTAN, SYRIA AND BRITT CELINE OLDEBRÅTEN, ADRA NORWAY

The Syrian conflict is at the start of its sixth year. Six million refugees were forced to flee; another 13.5 million within the country desperately need humanitarian assistance. In February 2012, ADRA Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was established in Beirut, Lebanon. This regional office provides programmatic, financial, and administrative assistance to the six existing country offices in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia and the Kurdish region of Iraq.

The Syria crisis has been described as one of the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. The protracted crisis has led to a continuous flow of refugees in Lebanon which now hosts the highest per-capita concentration of refugees in the world. Lebanon, despite being the smallest of the countries neighbouring Syria, is burdened by one of the largest

populations of displaced Syrians. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 1,070,189 registered Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. These figures do not take into account the number of unregistered Syrian refugees, which, based on estimations of local authorities, could be at least as large as the number of registered refugees. Recent findings of the latest Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees 2015 (VASyR) found that there are twenty-seven refugees per one hundred Lebanese in the country. This rapid population increase is placing extreme pressure on limited resources in an already fragmented country and has pushed thousands of people into poverty and worsened the situation of the already poor—refugees and local communities alike.

Syrian refugee children in Lebanon— a lost generation?

Children are the hardest hit by the crisis and pay the highest price as the most vulnerable group. It is not easy being a refugee child. Refugee children have left their home, friends, communities, and dreams, not to mention the material items that bring them comfort and happiness. In some cases, they have even left their families. They settle in new places where they do not know anyone, and many must begin working from a very young age to help their families merely survive. Their needs



often go unmet and they are increasingly traumatized by violence and destitution, exposed to abuse, suffering from inadequate education opportunities.

Education, in particular, remains a critical unmet need for many Syrian refugee children. School hasn't been an option for many in years. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, more than three million children have been denied their rights to an education. The conflict has led to broken schools, destroyed homes, and shattered families.

According to the 2015–2016 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), sixty-six percent of Syrian children registered as refugees with UNHCR are currently not in school; kept out by a combination of lack of space, high costs (specifically related to transport), too many years out of school, unfamiliar languages, and curricula. In comparison, ninety-five percent of children attended school in Syria before the conflict. If the trend continues, Syria faces a lost generation.

To deny a child's right to go to school goes beyond him missing out on the ABCs and 123s. The loss of education can hinder intellectual growth, psychosocial wellbeing, and future opportunities. Children who do not go to school, especially refugee children, are also at serious risk of being recruited as child soldiers, into child labor, or forced to marry at a young age.

There are many reasons why Syrian refugee children do not have access to educa-



Children enjoying informal educational activities at the ADRA community center.

tion. In places like Lebanon, refugee children often lack documentation to show how old they are and at what level of education they belong. Families often have problems paying for education. Refugees don't always have the opportunity to earn money and if they do, their income is minimal. Transport, tuition, and supplies all have a cost.

In September and October 2015, the government, in collaboration with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), made great strides to place at least 200,000 out-of-school refugee children in pub-

lic school through the first shift (morning classes), expanding to include a large number of children displaced from Syria, and a second shift (afternoon classes) created to accommodate a further caseload of children. However, the Lebanese public school system is overwhelmed and unable to serve all the children in need, particularly Kindergarten level.

At least 200,000 refugees still remain outside of the formal education system, continually deprived of their basic right. Moreover, dropout rates among Syrian children already enrolled in public school remain relatively high as children struggle to cope with the cur-

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Finally, school again! | BY MEMORY COX, ADRA LEBANON

Nour is a twelve-year-old girl who has been attending the ADRA center in Beirut since December 2014. She had been out of school for two years before her mother heard about the new center opened by ADRA in the neighborhood. For two years, Nour's mother tried and failed to enroll her and her two brothers into the local public schools. They were always turned away because there was no space for more students. Nour and her brothers Mohammed (6) and Maher (8) could not believe their luck when ADRA offered them places at the center.

Nour tells us that her father had been living in Lebanon as an economic migrant before the beginning of the Syrian crisis. Her mother and three younger brothers joined their father two years ago when it was no longer safe to stay in their town because of heavy fighting. In Syria, Nour and her eight-year-old brother were attending school, but upon arrival in Lebanon, they could not continue their education. Nour explains that the two years she was out of school were unbearable as most days were spent inside the house. The area where the family lives is too dangerous for children to play outside. Nour's parents are relieved that the children are continuing their education now. "The school

makes me happy and give me a sense of belonging," says Nour. She loves the psychosocial activities the most, and says she wants to work hard and become a doctor so she can help other refugees. Nour states: "I am happy here and I have a good time. I have friends to play with and I learn English. I hope the center doesn't close!" ■



12-year-old Nour is eager to learn after two years without school.

Small Grant—Big Change

BY ADRA KURDISTAN

Amina used a small grant to start a business, which supports her family.



All IDPs face tough challenges and this is especially true for Amina* (*name changed in order to protect the individual). When ISIL took control of Mosul in January 2014, Amina sold everything her family had in order to pay the US \$1,650 for herself, her husband and her three boys to escape from Mosul. After selling all their belongings, it still was not enough money to pay for the family to be able to flee to safety, so her husband chose to stay behind. Amina and her sons hired a truck and hid beneath items so they would not be seen during their escape to Baghdad. From Baghdad, Amina took her boys to Baharka Camp in March 2014, an IDP camp right outside Erbil.

Amina came in touch with the ADRA community center and because of her skills in sewing dresses and children's clothing, ADRA gave her a small grant. Two weeks was all it took Amina to earn US \$60 from various sewing jobs—just enough to support her family's needs. Amina is very grateful to ADRA for the help, and she looks forward to seeing others benefit as well. ■

riculum or struggle with homework support. This means that one needs to look at different solutions to ensure that refugee children can go to school.

The ADRA Learning Center in Beirut

ADRA has taken on the challenge, starting a learning center for refugee children in the El-Metn region in Beirut, Lebanon. The school has been running in a rented building since 2014 and offers an education center and non-formal education so that Syrian refugee children can catch up with the schooling they have lost because of the crisis.

The learning center caters for 120 vulnerable children from six to twelve years old, who are not already in formal or non-formal school because of lack of space to enroll; are not attending education activities because of financial constraints; have dropped out of school because of language barriers; or are not attending formal school because of safety concerns. Math, Science, English and Arabic subjects are being taught four days a week and one day a week is dedicated to psychosocial/recreational activities for all children at the center. Recreational activities include games, drawing, dancing, and sports, as well as awareness sessions. Counseling sessions are available to help children deal with trauma, cope with stress and assist in their integration with the host community.

In addition to the education and psychosocial activities, each month ADRA Lebanon holds joint community events aimed at enhancing social cohesion between refugee and Lebanese communities. Previous community events include soup kitchens, mini health expos, children's talent shows, mural paintings of public stairways and tree planting.

A new agreement, under discussion with the Middle East Adventist University, will enable the ADRA school to move to the university's premises in Beirut. The rented buildings were not meant for classrooms, and the children do not have any space to play outside. Where the new classrooms are planned to be built, the children will also have the chance to be outside on the beautiful campus grounds.

Iraq: ADRA changing lives among the IDPs

In the Kurdish areas of Iraq, ADRA support internally displaced persons (IDPs) through a community center supported by the ADRA network. The center has been located in the Baharka camp, but will soon move to a new location. The goal is to provide resilience to the IDPs through income generating activities, informal education and recreational activities. The center has been a blessing to many families. Just in November 2015, the center provided activities for 586 refugee children.

ADRA in Syria

ADRA is one of few organizations that has permission to work inside Syria. Through funding from external sources and the ADRA network, ADRA has been working to improve the health of internally displaced Syrians in rural Damascus through the reduction of water-borne diseases. With the help of ADRA, access to basic water and sanitation services has improved and shelters housing displaced individuals have been rehabilitated to become more liveable. In 2015, ADRA improved the shelter conditions of over 1,800 families, as well as distributing much needed hygiene kits and undertaking hygiene awareness to 5,000 families.

A safe environment for the family

Iman and Khadija, sisters aged six and eight, live in a two-bedroom apartment with their mother, father, aunt, and three cousins. Displaced from a neighboring city, just five kilometers away, they cannot return to their homes due to the conflict. Forced to flee their homes three years ago, they found refuge in a neighboring town in an unfinished building and were accepted by

the local community. Life before the conflict was simple, their mother Nadia recounts. The children all played together on the street and attended school, work was available and all the basic needs of life were met. However, due to the conflict they were forced to flee and stay in an apartment without electricity, water, windows, doors or washing facilities. Iman and Khadija's father is only able to find work a couple of days in the week, bringing in barely enough income to support the family. Despite the challenges, Nadia warmly smiles when asked about the improvements ADRA has made to her apartment. "Now I can close the windows to stop the cold air from entering and lock the door to feel safe at night. The children use the emergency lighting to study in the evenings and there is hot water to bath in." The small improvements that ADRA has made to services that we take for granted have had a huge impact in the lives of these families. ■

Restoring Dignity and Giving Opportunities | BY MEMORY COX, ADRA LEBANON

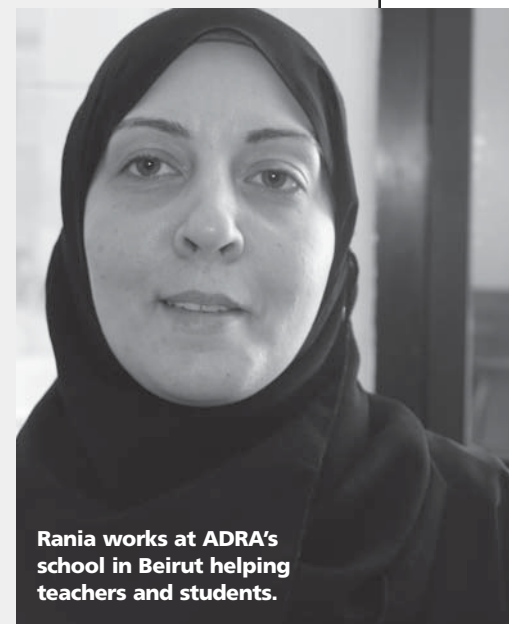
Rania (38) is all smiles when she talks about her job at the ADRA center. She is proud to help both the students and the teachers. Her job is to keep the school clean, sweeping, tidying up, dusting and mopping. Every day she is responsible for making the break time snacks and makes sure that the children have a different sandwich and fruit each day.

Rania started working at the school in March 2015. She says the job was a God-send as she had been looking for work unsuccessfully for over a year. She was in a very desperate situation as her husband, who was the sole breadwinner, was unable to work after an unfortunate accident at his job. Rania had many sleepless nights worrying about how she was going to feed her children and pay the rent. Her fifteen-year-old son works in a factory and earns \$200 a month, hardly enough to support a family of six.

Her family left Hama, Syria four years ago when their home was destroyed during intense fighting. She now lives in Beirut with her husband and four children. Her eight-year-old son attends the afternoon session of non-formal education at the ADRA center.

Rania says the job she has been given by ADRA has given her family hope. She explains that earning a salary has restored her dignity and her husband and children seem to respect her a lot more since she started working and making better decisions to support the family. Rania states that she is a different person since she started working. Her confidence has been boosted and she is no longer moody and harsh with her family like before as a lot of pressure has been lifted. She loves the fact that she works with refugee children as she shares their plight and is so grateful that she has made new friends.

"This school feels like a second home to me!" smiles Rania. ■



Rania works at ADRA's school in Beirut helping teachers and students.