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## Picturing health: challenges for Syrian refugees in Turkey

Although about 2.7 million refugees from Syria are registered in Turkey, most do not live in official refugee camps. The Turkish Government is working with UNHCR and other partners on a response, but many refugees find themselves in compromised conditions.

Thousands of Syrian refugees who have been smuggled into Turkey are recruited to work as migrant labourers, with the promise of

accommodation and pay. Upon arrival, however, people find that their new homes are informal camps with inadequate facilities that move sporadically with the harvests.

This summer I photographed and spoke with Syrian refugees working as migrant farmers in western Turkey. The poor living conditions in the migrant camps I visited contribute to health problems, which can be especially challenging for women

and children. Many refugees I met said it was difficult to access health care. Despite these challenges, some grassroots medical organisations of volunteer doctors and midwives are working to provide assistance. The photographs shown here capture some moments in the lives of the people I met and the issues they face.

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**Lack of clean water**

Syrian women refugees stand near the only water spigot in an informal migrant labour camp that houses about 160 people in an abandoned warehouse in western Turkey. Some refugees find their accommodation is without basic facilities, such as bathrooms and sewerage systems. According to medical volunteers, hygiene is one of the biggest challenges for refugee women living in these camps.



**A mother's care**

Aisha changes her daughter in a migrant labour camp in Turkey. Aisha, who has six children, fled the war in Syria 1 year ago but her 21-year-old daughter remains there. She said that she finds life in the camp very difficult because her children, who are not able to pursue an education, have to wake up early to begin working in the fields. Aisha said that she has never been to a hospital in Turkey. Access to health care is difficult for many migrants in the camps because of factors such as the long distances they have to travel to reach health-care facilities, being undocumented, lack of resources to pay, language barriers, and fears about how they will be treated.



**Space to play**

Children play in an abandoned warehouse that now houses Syrian refugees who work as migrant labourers for nearly half the minimum wage in Turkey. Many of the children remain out of school and do not have regular health checks. Because migrant camps move with the harvests, there is no permanent infrastructure so people sleep on the ground covered by plastic structures.



**Preparing bread**

18-year-old Abir prepares dough for bread. She is the mother of a 6-day-old baby and a 2-year-old child and has been in Turkey working as a migrant farmer for 2 years. She says that there are many hardships in the camps where she has lived, such as the inability to have clean food and water. According to medical volunteers, many people living in the camps are malnourished and infected with parasites from contaminated water sources. Volunteer midwives check iron concentrations and provide supplements for pregnant women to help support food intake.



#### Breastfeeding support

Taya Mohler, a certified professional midwife who volunteers in Turkey for the non-governmental organisation Midwife Pilgrim, and another volunteer discuss the protection afforded by breastfeeding with the mother of a newborn baby who was born prematurely. The volunteer holds a can of baby-milk formula used by the mother as they explain the health benefits of breastfeeding for mother and baby. Bottle-feeding can be especially dangerous in migrant camps because of the inability to properly sanitise bottles.



**Vital signs**

Midwife Taya Mohler examines a baby who was born prematurely after the mother showed signs of pre-eclampsia, which can be life threatening to both mother and baby. The woman was transported to the hospital when a volunteer midwife noticed her symptoms. "That's why I feel the work we do is so important because it helps to ensure that there's going to be more positive and safe outcomes in situations where health care is limited", said Mohler.



**A moment's rest**

20-year-old Saher prepares food while her young baby, Ali, rests nearby. She said that she hasn't been able to produce milk and that Ali has been having diarrhoea from the contaminated water in the camp.



**No place to call home**

Abir's husband holds their 6-day-old baby. "I'm afraid of the war in Syria, I'm afraid of what it's done to the country. I'm afraid there won't be something to go back to", Abir said. Alongside this uncertainty, they live with the daily challenges and insecurities of life as migrant labourers earning low wages with little access to proper health care while raising their children in poor living conditions.