IRAQI KURDISTAN: IDPs & REFUGEES - HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Equally important to stopping the likes of ISIS is the humanitarian crisis

- Virtually every family in Iraqi Kurdistan has direct experience with being displaced in the past.
- Today, in Iraqi Kurdistan displaced people are generally located in safe and secure areas where regional and local government organizations, UN agencies, and NGOs are able to provide secure, unfettered assistance.
- Except in certain, limited frontline areas Iraqi Kurdistan remains safe and secure for humanitarian workers who can usually travel throughout most of Iraqi Kurdistan without security arrangements of any kind.

Winter Shelter

- Winter is fast approaching and Kurdistan winters can be severe with very low temperatures, rain and mud, and snow not only on the mountains but also at lower elevations including in the main cities of Duhok, Erbil, and Slemani.
- Winterized shelters are essential. Currently, tens of thousands of displaced people are living in substandard conditions in hundreds of schools, an unacceptable situation that is also postponing education at more than 650 schools in Duhok Governorate alone.
- 1991 Temporary Solution: Following the 1991 war, with thousands of communities in Iraqi Kurdistan destroyed, the UN sent a procurement team to Turkey in September 1991, and 3,000 truckloads of building supplies arrived in October. These materials were supplied to families through 38 distribution points across Iraqi Kurdistan so they could build a one-room winterized shelter from the rubble of their destroyed communities. Some materials were used to refurbish abandoned military and other public facilities. In addition, 3,000 two-family pre-fab winterized shelters, manufactured in Turkey, were erected for families evicted from Kirkuk who could not return to their communities. More than 60,000 families were provided with shelter assistance. The 1991-1992 winter was the worst ever since. These shelter measures were somewhat adequate, but they were not good.
- 2014 Temporary Solution: Notwithstanding possible intrusive security measures, and politics, today Turkey offers a much more acceptable model in providing comfortable and clean all-weather shelters to Syrian refugees. "No tents. None of the smells — rotting garbage, raw sewage — usually associated with human crush and lack of infrastructure." "Except for some relatively minor international donations, the financial responsibility, and all the administrative responsibility, has been Turkey’s alone." With its substantial oil revenue Iraq can well afford to do no less. See The New York Times Magazine article below.
- Permanent solution for displaced people is to be able to return to their homes in a peaceful environment where they can restart and rebuild their lives. Any camp is still a camp, a temporary place for displaced people before they move on to a permanent solution of return or resettlement.

Understanding IDP and Refugee Situations and their Needs

While they are essentially the same in terms of being forcibly displaced, there's a difference between IDPs and refugees in how their needs are assessed and met.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people involuntarily displaced from their homes who flee to places within their own country. Refugees are people involuntarily displaced from their homes who flee outside their country, across international borders.

The needs of each are addressed under different international laws, protocols, conventions, responses, or approaches. Different UN agencies contribute to addressing different needs of each, and some address the needs of both.

The Numbers

(On average, each IDP family is estimated at 6 persons. The average size of refugee households varies from place to place.)

- More than 1.7 million Iraqi citizens (285,000 families) have been forcibly displaced from their homes throughout their country. IDPs are located in more than 1,600 places throughout Iraq in all 18 governorates (provinces).
- Of these, more than 1.2 million (more than 200,000 families), more than 70%, have been displaced since June.
- In addition, there are more than 250,000 registered Syrian refugees, with an additional number unregistered.
- Way more than the population of Dubai (or Hawaii) has been displaced. Imagine your home place of comparable size becoming evacuated due to violence or the threat of violence.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the numbers look like this:
(IDPs are estimated based on field assessments by IOM and the KRG Ministry of Planning, refugees are based on registration by UNHCR):

- Duhok Governorate (Province) IDPs: 465,000 (77,500 families) Refugees: 94,000 (30,000 households)
- Erbil Governorate IDPs: 177,000 (29,000 families) Refugees: 89,000 (34,000 households)
- Slemani (Suleimaniya) Governorate IDPs: 90,000 (15,000 families) Refugees: 24,000 (10,000 households)
- TOTAL IDPs: 732,000 (121,500 families) Refugees: 207,000 (74,000 households)

TOTAL IDPs + Refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan: **939,000 (328,500 families/households)**
(Because the number continues to rise, let's say one (1) million as the working figure for planning purposes.)

More data and information are available at:

IDPs	**IOM**	**http://iomiraq.net/dtm-page**
Refugees	**UNHCR**	**http://www.unhcr.org/4c9084e49.html**

Summary Notes:

- Displaced people in Iraq thus include more than 4 million IDPs plus more than 250,000 refugees.
- Iraqi Kurdistan hosts **more than 50%** of all IDPs in Iraq, which include ALL ethnic and religious groups - Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, Shia, Sunni, Christian, Yezidi, Shabak, Mandean.
- Iraqi Kurdistan hosts **more than 80%** of all Syrian refugees in Iraq.
- Since 2013, mostly Sunnis in Anbar Governorate facing violence from ISIS attacks, especially in Ramadi and Fallujah areas, fled to other parts of Iraq including 66,000 (11,000 families) who fled to Iraqi Kurdistan.
- Shia Turkmen from Tal Afar and other places have also fled to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Providing Assistance

First, when addressing essential basic needs of high numbers of IDPs and refugees it is best for individuals NOT to donate in-kind goods for general distribution. Cash donations to credible, reputable, reliable, and accountable organizations are far better.

All essential items to meet basic needs are available locally in-country and/or from neighboring countries; all basic items, everything, are available in Iraq and/or from Turkey. Food, hygiene items, and in-kind items like blankets and cooking utensils, water containers, etc. are all available from closer, local sources.

Individually donated items to meet basic needs may be free but there are substantial additional costs and inefficiencies associated with accepting, storing, sorting, packing, forwarding, insuring, transporting, receiving, warehousing, more sorting, more transportation, and distribution. All these steps increase direct costs and manpower requirements, and cause delay. Clothing can be especially problematic.

There are many people who participated in the massive 1991 refugee crisis in Iraq, especially local staff, who could describe, and perhaps contribute, their experience in managing the logistics of emergency assistance.

In emergency situations where high numbers of people are in need, to reduce costs and speed delivery the key element is logistics efficiency. Procurement and delivery of basic items are greatly facilitated when such items are bulk procured in full truckloads from closest reliable sources at reasonable prices and delivered directly from supplier/vendor to warehousing facilities at distribution sites.

Suppliers in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey can probably meet all essential basic needs. Basic food items are usually provided in bulk by shiploads and transported direct from port to site by the UN World Food Programme (WFP). Medicines and other health items are usually provided in bulk by WHO and UNICEF. Blankets, cooking utensils, mattresses, and other basic in-kind items are best procured locally.

In emergency situations, bulk is best. Procurement and transportation costs, and delivery time, are usually lowest.

To avoid increasing costs, delay, and waste from North America and Europe, consider donating cash, not goods.

This is not to say that individual in-kind donations are not welcome. But they are best handled on an individual basis through local, reliable people and organizations to help specific groups in specific locations.

Displaced people will always require more than the items procured and provided in bulk by the UN. It's better to do on-site assessments and local procurement to help meet these additional needs. Some local people and organizations are already doing this by promoting accountability with detailed accounts, and photo and video reports.

UN Agencies and NGOs

IOM. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is an intergovernmental organization that focuses on humane and orderly migration, often in emergency situations. IOM is not a UN organization, but it usually works in conjunction with the UN. IOM is very much involved with IDPs by monitoring and assessing, and providing emergency assistance and transportation.

UNHCR. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), often called The UN Refugee Agency, focuses on the protection and support of refugees. Funded by the international community, UNHCR is usually the key coordinator of refugee assistance - shelter, food, water and sanitation, non-food items (cooking utensils, blankets, sanitary items, etc.), health and education services, etc. Assistance is provided by UN partner agencies and other implementing partners, including local government and international and local NGOs.

Other UN agencies providing assistance to IDPs and refugees: food and nutrition - World Food Programme/WFP, water and sanitation - UNICEF, medical-health - UNICEF and WHO, education - UNICEF and UNESCO.

Many international and local NGOs also provide assistance to IDPs and refugees, eg. CARE, CRS, Caritas, IRC, MSF, Oxfam, SCF, Qandil, PWJ, REACH, RISE, Barzani Foundation, and many more.

And, of course, host governments provide assistance to IDPs and refugees in many forms. In Iraqi Kurdistan the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) at all levels has been providing substantial assistance, security, and administrative support.

Background

Before Mosul-Sinjar, sectarian strife in Iraq forcibly displaced up to 4 million people. Roughly, 2 million were IDPs and 2 million refugees.

Shia and Sunni IDPs fled Baghdad and other places where they lived in mixed neighborhoods for decades. Before-and-after maps of Baghdad clearly show how mixed neighborhoods became either Shia or Sunni.

Other groups faced similar threats. Christians, Mandeans, Yazidis, and Shabaks fled Baghdad, Mosul, and other places where they were specifically targeted for persecution.

While 2 million became IDPs, another 2 million fled mostly to Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. As conflict increased in Syria, many Iraqi refugees again fled, to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Some returned to Iraq where they later faced more conflict only to be displaced again.

Since 2013, Sunnis in Anbar Governorate facing violence from ISIS attacks, especially in Ramadi and Fallujah areas, fled to other parts of Iraq, including 66,000 (11,000 families) who fled to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan - IDPs and Refugees

Iraqi Kurdistan has always been a safe haven and refuge for IDPs and refugees since it began administering itself in 1991. It began in early 1991 when the international community under UN Security Council Resolution 688 provided security and humanitarian assistance in northern Iraq.

Security was initially provided by a US-led coalition of forces from 11 countries. It included a no-fly zone and a security zone in Iraqi territory that became known as the safe haven. More than a million IDPs and refugees voluntarily returned to their homes. The US-led coalition, UN agencies, and international NGOs provided humanitarian assistance to assist families reconstruct and resettle thousands of destroyed communities.

Later in 1991 the Iraqi government imposed a militarized demarcation line separating what became known as the Kurdistan Region from the rest of Iraqi Kurdistan and from the rest of the country. Food, fuel, and electricity were cut. More than 20,000 families evicted from Kirkuk areas sought refuge in the Region.

In addition, Kurds and Arabs threatened by the Saddam regime in other parts of Iraq also sought refuge in the Region, including members of Nouri al-Maliki's own Dawa Party. The Region also hosted refugees from Syria, Turkey, and Iran in Balqus, Maqubla, Zawita, and near Atrush in Duhok Governorate, and also near Koisenjaq and Rawanduz in Erbil Governorate. Smaller groups of IDPs and refugees were scattered throughout the Region.

BBC
19 Aug 2014
video

Iraq crisis: Desperate plight of refugees near Dohuk

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28858602

BBC
19 Aug 2014
video

Uncertain future for Yazidi refugees

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28842520

The New York Times
7 Sep 2014

With Schools Doubling as Shelters in Northern Iraq, Classes Wait

By AZAM AHMED

DOHUK, Iraq — From the look of it, the Khabat primary school bustles with life. Children flit through the building’s atrium, weaving between stacked school desks and racing past the colorful murals that adorn the walls.

But the schools here will not be opening on time this year. The throngs of children playing in the school are among hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqis who fled the advance of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria across the north of Iraq this summer.

With no established camps for them to move into, more than 130,000 people took up residence in 650 schools in this Kurdish province in northern Iraq, carving out homes in the offices and classrooms of the buildings while posing a problem for the government this academic year. Already, the Kurdish government has delayed the start of school by a month, to Wednesday. But almost no one thinks that deadline can be met, not even the education ministry that set it.

“We will need at least two months, but that’s just my personal guess,” said Pishtiwan Sadiq, the minister of education for Kurdistan.

For now, there is nowhere else to put these displaced families — or the children whose education has been delayed. Aid organizations, government officials and the teachers’ union all suspect it will be many more months until a solution is found.

“We have no options, actually,” said the Dohuk governor, Farhad Atrushi.

The delayed start of the school year reflects how much the government has been struggling to provide basic services for its citizens in northern Iraq as conflict rages.

Electricity in Dohuk is largely generated by burning fuel, which was costing the city several million dollars a day before a wave of refugees, many of them from the Yazidi religious minority, arrived here. Water is also a problem. With a pre-refugee population of more than 1.2 million in the province of Dohuk, the water supply was barely sufficient. With an estimated half-million more people drawing on water resources now, the future looks pretty dry.

The government has made plans to build new refugee camps, but it is not clear when they will be ready. The government lacks the funds to supply refugees with food, water or services such as electricity and sanitation.

The shortage of camps also reflects the rapidly changing dynamics on the ground. Areas originally slated for refugees were abandoned after ISIS fighters pressed closer to the locations.

As a result, the newly homeless arriving in Dohuk were forced to find alternative accommodations. Half-constructed buildings, community centers, schools, abandoned basements and parking garages swarm with the dispossessed. The dispersion of people from areas where the fighting is heaviest makes it hard to determine the number of displaced and their needs.

From Mr. Atrushi’s perspective, each potential solution is as challenging as the last. There is some hope that Kurdish pesh merga fighters, with the help of American airstrikes and the Iraqi military, will liberate Sinjar, the home of many of the refugees. But even if that objective is achieved, it will be difficult to persuade the displaced to return to their homes, Mr. Atrushi said.

Mr. Atrushi, who has been applauded by aid organizations as well as refugees for his response to the crisis, said he may also be forced to move families out of the schools and into open spaces, already overcrowded abandoned buildings or the streets.

“The vast majority are scattered in different locations,” said Nicole Walden, the team leader for the International Rescue Committee, referring to the refugees. “This crisis requires creative thinking.”

Families in schools fare better than those in the camps. The wide corridors offer cool breezes and protection from the blistering heat. The compounds are easier to secure, and offer more privacy, in addition to the proximity of water, electricity and standard toilets.

It was these amenities that drew Murad Ghalil, a member of the Yazidi religious minority, to the Khabat school this month. After fleeing Syria, Mr. Ghalil initially stayed with a relative. But as more people arrived, he decided to find a more permanent solution for the elderly and the infants, who would suffer in a camp.

So he visited the ministry of education, and officials there offered him a school.

Now, 174 people live in the building. They have set up cooking stations and mattresses. Their laundry hangs from the second-floor banister that looks out over the atrium. They pray on the rooftop.

Among Mr. Ghalil’s Yazidi relatives, who practice an ancient religion with roots in Muslim and Zoroastrian traditions, there are 42 children who were attending school in Sinjar. He is hoping those students can join the 150 who normally attend Khabat.

“We are comfortable,” said Mr. Ghalil, a Yazidi elder. But he knows that the comfort is temporary, and that inevitably their situations will change. But, he acknowledged, “no one has told us how long we can stay.”

The sentiment is the same at other schools: a sense of ease and comfort, in particular compared with the distress many have endured, buffeted by an abiding concern about the coming school year, whenever it arrives.

“We hope the government doesn’t ask us to move,” said Farhan Ghayab, a Kurdish Muslim from Sinjar, whose family has set itself up in another Dohuk school. “We know it’s impossible to stay, because education is important for this region, but we are hoping.”

The New York Times Magazine
13 Feb 2014

How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp

By MAC McCLELLAND

Kilis, a refugee camp in Turkey near the Syrian border.

From the outside, the temporary shelter for Syrian civilians in Kilis, Turkey, doesn’t look like an inviting place to live. It looks like a prison. All around are olive groves, but here, Turkey suddenly runs out. A metal archway announces the customs gate to Syria. To its right stands what is more formally known as the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency’s Kilis Oncupinar Accommodation Facility. High gates bar entry, and barbed wire tops the walls. Police officers and private security mill about.

Many of the world’s displaced live in conditions striking for their wretchedness, but what is startling about Kilis is how little it resembles the refugee camp of our imagination. It is orderly, incongruously so. Residents scan a card with their fingerprints for entry, before they pass through metal detectors and run whatever items they’re carrying through an X-ray machine. Inside, it’s stark: 2,053 identical containers spread out in neat rows. No tents. None of the smells — rotting garbage, raw sewage — usually associated with human crush and lack of infrastructure.

At the entrance to Kilis. CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

On April 29, 2011, 263 Syrians crossed into Turkey, fleeing civil war at home. Within 24 hours, the Turkish government set up an emergency tent camp for them in southern Hatay Province. In less than three years, it was operating 22 camps serving 210,000 refugees, mostly in provinces along its roughly 500-mile-long border with Syria. Kilis, opened in 2012, was one of six container camps meant to offer a better standard of shelter to incoming refugees. When I visited last October, the camp was full, and a group of squatters outside waited for placement.

As we entered, my translator, Ahmad Ajouz, himself a Syrian refugee who lives in an apartment in nearby Gaziantep, said to no one in particular, “It’s so clean.” Turkish workers, hunting for litter to sweep from the meticulously laid, brand-new brick paths, were merely doing maintenance between rounds of street-washing trucks. Suddenly, one of these appeared, spraying down and scrubbing the avenues.

There were other luxuries. Power lines, and at least as many streetlights as you would find in a nice suburban neighborhood. Multiple playgrounds that look like McDonald’s PlayPlaces. Containers housing maintenance men who can fix electric or plumbing problems. Fire hydrants.

A makeshift cafe and bird store.CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

Several large structures housed the camp’s schools. The first was the Olive Preschool and Kindergarten. The children weren’t yet in class, and as we walked on the gleaming tiles, the spacious hallway echoed. Big cutouts of Snow White and the dwarfs decorated the walls, along with Turkish flags. A sign read, “You’re welcome.”

The principal, Gulcin Dogan, a 26-year-old Turk with long light hair and glossy red lipstick, met us in front of one classroom. There are two floors, she explained, one for each grade, about 450 kids in each. Dogan, a psychologist by training, does double duty counseling children in need of it. Which is many of them.

At the next school over, class was in session. You could hear children reciting and clapping; from the window, several waved. Two thousand two hundred and twenty-five students attend school here, in sex-segregated classes per the Syrians’ request. One Syrian teacher admitted that this refugee-camp school is nicer than the public schools at home.

“It’s the nicest refugee camp in the world!” a Polish diplomat staying at my hotel crowed when I mentioned the place to him the next day. Standing with him was an Italian official;

he nodded vehemently in agreement. No one I spoke to — not the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, not academics, not even the refugees — denies that the standard of living here is exceptionally high. When I later listed the amenities to a refugee expert, she replied, “I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

A child refugee outside one of the containers. CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

“You have a refugee problem, what do you do?” said a Turkish official who, like most officials in Turkey, would speak only on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press. “That’s what’s done. You’re not discovering America again. It’s a normal response.”

But the fact is, it isn’t — not just because the camps are unusually well equipped but also because Turkey long ago exempted itself from any obligation to respond at all. Technically, the 14,000 residents at Kilis are not refugees but “guests” of Turkey. This is not just semantics. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees prohibits states from forcing them back over borders into danger and guarantees their right to work, shelter, travel and public assistance. Turkey signed the agreement but did so with a “geographical limitation”: Its mandate applies only to refugees from Europe.

Initially refusing Syrian refugees entry might have been difficult, given the already open border between the two countries and the gaps between checkpoints and a war close enough to bring in stray fire. The Syrians are also mostly Sunni Muslims, and Turkey has a record of embracing refugees with ethnic and cultural ties; it absorbed more than 300,000 from Bulgaria in 1989 and 25,000 from Bosnia in the early ‘90s. Whatever the reason, Turkey decided to open its arms to its war-ravaged Syrian neighbors. Except for intermittent closures, when fighting is too intense or fears of terrorist activity at the border arise, any Syrians with passports can cross through checkpoints. They come and go all day, some of them driving in, others on foot, carrying their belongings in big bundles or wearing dress slacks and trailing roller suitcases. Turkey is building walls along small sections of its border where the Syrian-side clashes involve Kurds, and it sometimes closes the border to those without passports pending security clearance, as happened recently when large numbers of Syrians fled intensive bombing in Aleppo. But when I was at Kilis, even those without passports could move unimpeded around the checkpoint. They streamed steadily in and out of the olive groves, appearing or disappearing among the trees.

Crossing the Syrian-Turkish border near Kilis. CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

Why would Turkey be so willing to house refugees — and to house them so well at its own expense? Unlike almost all other refugee camps in the world, Kilis is not run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Rather, Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, or AFAD, asked the U.N.H.C.R. for its camp guidelines — minimum distance between tents, and so on — and then designed its own. It staffed the camps with Turkish government employees, allowing in few NGOs and giving those only supporting roles. Except for some relatively minor international donations, the financial responsibility, and all the administrative responsibility, has been Turkey’s alone.

This approach, while costly, has given the Turks a measure of control over every detail —

including who is working in their country. Typically, camps are serviced by a number of NGOs, and there can be overlap — or gaps — in the services they provide. The agencies may fight among themselves or clash with local leaders; each has its own hierarchies and staff members, drawn from an unlimited number of nations. Running a camp that way, the Turkish government official speculated, would be complicated: “There’s too many people coming and going. It’s not secure. And it’s distracting.”

But some also think that the Turks were making a savvy bet. Many thought the fighting in Syria wouldn’t last very long. That’s one reason, says Kemal Kirisci, director of the Turkey Project at the Brookings Institution, that the Turks may have invested in such elaborate camps. “It needs to be seen in the context of Turkey’s policy to create one integrated market in the Middle East. The Syrians were going to come, and they were going to stay in these camps, and every single one was going to go home and become grand ambassadors of Turkey.” As Turkey’s economy has grown, so has its hope of being a significant actor on the geopolitical stage. “The Turks have a burning desire to show the external world how great they’re doing. These camps are a very visible way of doing it. With the assumption that it wouldn’t last long, the cost was worth the benefit.”

Which is, of course, what everyone always thinks: Refugees are supposed to be in their host countries only temporarily. But of the 15.4 million refugees globally, most have been in camps for at least five years. Since Turkey established its first container camp, Syria’s civil war has only escalated. There are projected to be 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey by year’s end.

The Turks may have built as good a refugee camp as it is possible to build. But a camp is still a camp. And if a camp becomes a shelter not just for a few months but for years, a substitute — even a deterrent — to a real solution, how much does it matter how nice it is?

Rouba Bakri, 30, has been at Kilis since 2012. “It’s perfect,” she told me, after she invited me into her home. It is a 23-by-10-foot trailer with three rooms, like every other trailer. The front door is lockable. The bathroom is serviced by its own plumbing and hot-water tank; the kitchen is equipped with both a refrigerator and a stove. In the living room, long cushions and pillows were propped against the walls, and from a color TV in the corner blared the Cartoon Network. When I asked Bakri how many channels she had, she laughed and said: “So, so many. A thousand?”

One thing you notice, entering Kilis for the first time, is how many of the containers have satellite dishes.

Residents of Kilis inside their container. CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

Twelve people live in Bakri’s container. Her husband, her husband’s parents, her three children, her husband’s three brothers, one of whom has a son, and a nephew. And 15 canaries in three cages that Bakri brought from Syria. They survived the mortar attack that destroyed her home, but they don’t sing anymore. Or lay eggs.

Like many of the refugees at Kilis, Bakri fled heavy shelling in northern Syria, where government forces have long been in pitched battle with rebel groups, and rebel groups often battle each other. And like many of the refugees, she often finds herself at loose ends. In a camp, no matter how large the family, boredom prevails. Aside from cooking and cleaning, there is little to do. Errands are within a five-minute walk; there is no livestock to tend or garden to hoe. To keep busy, Bakri works as the unpaid manager of the camp’s laundry centers. Each camp section has one; families can drop off laundry twice a week and pick it up soon after, cleaned, free of charge. “It’s good,” said a 44-year-old Syrian volunteer named Malak Jamal, who works in the laundry of Section C, where she lives. “There are no problems.” Then she added, “The whole camp is good.” Behind the laundry room is an activities center. One room has 10 enormous looms; the Turks provide cotton and weaving lessons. Another houses a sewing workshop — it was packed when I visited — and yet another functions as a beauty salon.

“Those Syrians who say the Turkish government is bad are liars and dogs,” Bakri’s father-in-law exclaimed, between drags on a cigarette. “If you can’t get what you want, people complain.” He could easily be one of those complainers, crammed as his family is into one trailer. But the camp is full. “I know the situation,” the old man said. He came, he continued, with this one purple-pinstriped shirt on his back, the one he was wearing, because he intended to stay 10 days, not two and a half years. He had no money or food. “So if I’m a good man, I must be grateful to them. They don’t have to do this, after all.”

The containers have three rooms, with hot-water tanks and separate plumbing in the bathrooms.CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

Gratitude for the host country pervades the camp. When I sat down with Basheer Alito, the leader of Bakri’s section, he told me several times to write that he wished to thank the Turkish government, that the camp is very good and that the government is very good. Each of the camp’s sections has a leader, and Alito is the leader of the leaders (he was elected a year ago). He meets with his constituents when they have problems: fixing a damaged trailer or getting a pregnant woman to the hospital. The camp has a simple clinic staffed by Turkish doctors — and their translators — with free treatment and medicine; transport is arranged to nearby hospitals when serious health issues arise. As the refugees’ liaison with the camp administrator, Alito “of course” hears complaints, but it’s only from people who “don’t understand the situation.” He wanted to thank the Turkish government for treating the Syrians like brothers, he said, though the Turks aren’t even Arabs. Would that the Arab governments in countries like Jordan were doing such a good job helping their fellow Arabs, he went on, instead of sticking them in camps overflowing with trash and crime.

It is true that conditions for refugees in Jordan had become synonymous with violence and suffering. Still, I found Alito so adamant in his appreciation as to make me suspicious. But two other section leaders I talked to expressed the same feeling. One of these, Ibrahim Harmoush, seemed much less the politician than Alito. Broad-shouldered with salt-and-pepper hair, he had the posture of a man who doesn’t pull punches. Harmoush, it turned out, was the brother of a high-level officer in the Syrian Army, Lt. Col. Hussein Harmoush, who defected to Turkey a few months into the war and became an instant hero of the revolution. Later he ended up back in the regime’s hands, then disappeared.

“Turkish officers betrayed him and gave him to the Syrian regime,” Ibrahim said. Since a televised confession more than two years ago, he hasn’t been heard from. Last October, several Turks, including a former intelligence official, were sentenced for their role in the abduction of Ibrahim’s brother.

Even so, when I asked Ibrahim if he had any complaints about the camp, he struggled to come up with one. Finally, he said that sometimes a new administrator is appointed head of the camp, and he’ll have slightly different rules from the last one, and there’s the inconvenience of building a new relationship. But over all, he wanted to thank the Turkish government for the good work they do at Kilis.

Perhaps nothing encapsulates that work so well as the way the Turks supply refugees with food. At Kilis, there are three grocery stores, side by side like a mini strip mall. Every family is given a debit card when they register, and every month, they get a balance of 80 Turkish lira, close to $40, per person for food and $10 per person for sundries. Inside the grocery stores are undulating produce sections, meat counters, dry-goods shelves and refrigerated dairy cases. At the checkout, refugees swipe their cards and show their IDs.

“What do you think?” I asked Ajouz, my translator, as we toured the markets.

“It’s better than a grocery store in Syria,” he mumbled.

A well-stocked supermarket in the camp.**CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times**

Nesrin Semen, a senior program assistant for the World Food Programme, which is helping run the project, told me that this is “a new modality of providing food assistance.” The W.F.P. doesn’t have an office here, as it does in other countries’ refugee camps, but the government invited it in for this pilot program. Semen was here with a team to check on how it was going — well, seemed to be the assessment. “It’s effective,” she began, “it’s cost-effective, it’s faster” — more so than, say, shipping food to storage centers, transporting it to camp distribution centers and having people wait in line to pick up bland rations, as the W.F.P. does in some other countries. “There are no delays; it’s logistically simple,” she continued, adding that “it supports the local economy.” In a survey, the refugees reported that they liked the grocery-store/debit-card system. It requires infrastructure, like electricity and an Internet connection, that not all refugee-camp locations have. But “in the future,” Semen said, “anywhere we can do this, we will.”

According to Semen, Jordan and Lebanon are implementing the same system. Posters I saw on the grocery-store windows announced that the United States Agency for International Development, the British, the Swiss, the French, the Japanese, the U.N.H.C.R. and the Danes are all contributing money for the food debit cards. (Since then, other countries have joined the program.) For Turkey, the grocery stores are proving comparatively inexpensive. Before the stores opened in October 2012, the Turkish government was spending nearly four times as much on food. Because before that, it was serving the refugees three hot meals a day. Catered.

Worldwide, refugee counts are at their highest since the Rwandan genocide. There are hundreds of camps in dozens of countries, and the NGO network that services them is large and complex. In some, the conditions are primitive, and aid agencies struggle to provide basic services. Others operate like ad hoc cities but without the advantage of a government. In the longstanding camps on the Thai-Myanmar border, about 120,000 refugees are serviced by numerous organizations, providing rations, health care, schools, vocational workshops, social-inclusion programs for the handicapped and a library system. To avoid chaos, the NGOs have formed a committee to coordinate services, which is then broken down into subcommittees.

In the Turkish camps, says Carol Batchelor, the U.N.H.C.R.’s representative in Turkey,

“Turkey has taken the primary role, and they’re very consistent.” The Turkish government ministries appoint staff members — the Ministry of Family and Social Policy appointed Kilis’s kindergarten principal, Dogan — and all of them report to the camp administrator, who is also appointed. The camp administrator reports directly to the governor of the region. With its model, Turkey has cut down on some of the major hazards associated with refugee camps: vandalism, theft, sexual assault, diverted supplies. “Any place you have 14,000 people living, and living in that proximity, there are challenges,” Batchelor continued. “But these problems that exist in other camps are much less prevalent there.”

Take crime. I asked almost every one of the dozens of Syrians I interviewed during the four days that I spent in the camp about crime. All reported that other than the occasional fight, they were not aware of any. This was true not just in Kilis but in Nizip I, a tent camp that was founded after Turkey realized it couldn’t build enough container camps to house all the Syrian refugees. Because there are no doors to lock, and bathrooms are located in blocks, security is always more lax in tent camps. But even here, the residents’ assessments didn’t differ. “It’s fully safe!” a bubbly 38-year-old named Warda Aboud assured me, throwing her arms out in front of her, palms down. While rape is an epidemic in many camps, at Nizip I, Aboud said, she didn’t worry about it: “There’s guards everywhere. At night, the lights are like daylight. I can go out alone at 4 a.m., 3 a.m.”

Both Kilis and Nizip I appear to lack the black markets found in camps around the world, where donated supplies are stolen and sold back to refugees. This has been widely reported as a plague at the Za’atari camp in Jordan, where the practice consolidates wealth and power among gangs that form there and leaves some refugees lacking food and even shelter. In Kilis, each of the three grocery stores is run by a different private company to prevent price gouging. Competition, the theory goes, will keep prices reasonable.

But operating camps this way is expensive. “This has cost them,” Batchelor says. Expenditures at the Kilis camp run to at least $2 million a month. By the end of 2013, the Turkish government had spent $2.5 billion on its Syrian guests, primarily in camps — a figure that has created resentment among Turks. The Turkish official I spoke to acknowledged that there were widespread rumors that the Syrian refugees were given gifts of a million dollars each.

Such rumors are clearly outlandish, but for Turks struggling to make ends meet, the services extended to Syrian refugees might well seem extraordinary. At Nizip II, a container camp that opened 10 months after Kilis, I walked into the beauty salon as a woman was getting a blowout. Free. When I asked the administrator why the camp took the amenities this far, he said: “We just put ourselves in the Syrians’ shoes. We need Internet. We need barbershops. We need workshops. We need art. What we need as Turks, we give them.” He shrugged as though this were totally obvious. “We’re humans.”

Nizip II, another refugee camp set up by the Turkish government near the Syrian border.CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

Of the 2.5 million Syrian refugees created by the country’s ongoing conflict, Turkey is now host to about 25 percent. “What’s potentially a problem for Turkey,” says Anita Fabos, the former director of the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies program at the American University in Cairo, “is resentment breeding not just in the short term but over the long term.”

Last October, the U.N.H.C.R. had a high-level meeting to discuss how to help the vast number of Syrians who continue to pour into neighboring countries. The first of three standard solutions, voluntary repatriation, was off the table, as it is for millions of refugees. The second, incorporating them fully into the citizenry of their countries of refuge, was, too: For one thing, politicians in Jordan and Lebanon, where Syrian refugees are now estimated to make up about 10 and 20 percent of the populations, respectively, have been complaining about the burden on schools and job markets. That left just a single option: third-country resettlement. “We’re looking for solidarity in every form, in every measure, and certainly any new forms of solidarity,” says Batchelor, who attended the meeting. “We’re asking states to be extremely flexible” about not holding Syrians to the sometimes years long process of resettlement or sticking to low resettlement quotas. When I asked her if that request was being granted, she paused a bit before saying: “There was a robust interest and expression of solidarity. We’d like to see that expression of solidarity materialized in more practical terms.” (According to Amnesty International, only 55,000 Syrian refugees have claimed asylum in the European Union.)

In Turkey, Syrian refugees come on top of an already significant refugee influx. Last year, Batchelor processed applications from more than 60 different countries. Many have been there for at least six years. These refugees do not live in camps. None were built for them. Like more than half the world’s refugees, they are “urban refugees,” or “self settled” refugees, semi-integrated into the population.

Sources of aid exist, but as Kamyar Jarahzadeh, the American representative for the Coordination Group of Afghan Refugees in Turkey, pointed out, it’s “piecemeal and hard to get.” (Afghanistan is currently one of the largest countries of origin for Turkey’s refugees — and indeed the largest source of refugees worldwide for the last 32 years.) “Most people we see are getting nothing. There’s no centralized effort, and at the end of the day, even if everyone knew about aid, there wouldn’t be enough to go around.”

Urban refugees don’t always have the right to work and can be detained or fined for trying. It can be difficult for them to get health care or schooling for their children. In many ways, they may find themselves living like illegal immigrants, lost between the cracks of refugee policy — and absent from our consciousness. Some 400,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey live outside the camps. Those with means settle in apartments; the less fortunate camp in parks and empty lots. Many Syrians fled with more savings than the average refugee, but the length of the conflict would exhaust even large reserves. And from an aid standpoint, being from Syria, a fresher and more visible conflict, doesn’t make being an urban refugee any easier. Louis Belanger, then the humanitarian-media officer for Oxfam, told me the organization was struggling to get people to respond to the message that most Syrian refugees were outside camps but equally in need of aid. People somehow saw them as less deserving. “It is difficult to raise the funds for them,” he said.

Outside two of the grocery stores in Kilis. The three stores in the camp are operated by different private companies to prevent price gouging. CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

Given the difficulties of integrating refugees into a host country’s population, those in the camps often end up staying there because aid is more readily available. But there, they can become lost in other ways, inhabiting a constant state of uncertainty.

“More and more refugees in the world in camps are in camps that have been there for a really, really long time,” says Fabos, who now teaches in the International Development and

Social Change program at Clark University in Massachusetts. “That wasn’t the original model. Our model was that camps were there just to hold people temporarily until one of these ‘durable solutions’: sending them back home, allowing them to settle where they are — with legal rights — or settle them in a third place.” Almost all the post-World War II displaced-person, or D.P., camps were closed and their residents resettled by 1952. But three years ago, the largest refugee camp in the world, Kenya’s Dadaab, turned 20. It was built for 90,000 refugees. It holds more than 420,000.

“Camps are places where it’s quite straightforward to provide services for people,” Fabos says. “The U.N. and humanitarian agencies are so good at providing resources.” Every day, the World Food Programme alone operates an average of 5,000 trucks, 50 aircraft and 30 ships, as well as trains, river barges, mules, yaks, camels and donkeys. “The problem is when people start living in those situations more than the presumable amount of time that people should be living in those situations. To the U.N.H.C.R., if they live in camp for more than five years, they become an acronym: P.R.S.” — protracted refugee situation — “the majority of encamped refugees are in protracted refugee situations. The state system is more and more unable to accommodate what’s happening on the ground.”

By global standards, the Syrian refugees, who have been in camps for up to three years, are new arrivals. Even so, they know what it means to put their lives on hold. “Ninety percent of the guys here are delaying marriage,” Muhammad Deeb, 21, told me. He has set up a clothing shop in a small tent, stocked with merchandise his uncle gave him the money to buy. Other refugees in Kilis, who are not allowed to work outside the camp, have also started businesses of some kind. There are canary stores, falafel stands, bicycle-repair shops and tea shops. There is a tent-size department store selling clothes, glasses and rugs; a coat shop; a jeans shop; a general store; a little joint with two slushy machines churning in two colors (red and orange); a tiny gaming cafe with three computers where a 15- and a 16-year-old sell access to playing Counter-Strike. But these typically offer little if any extra income. At one barbershop, I stopped to ask for a price list, and the proprietor said it was free.

Deeb keeps prices as low as possible as “a service to my people” — a children’s Adidas tracksuit is $5. So while he can supplement his refugee allowance, it’s not enough for a family. He is tall, lanky and single. In Syria, he says, in a village of 5,000, there would normally be two weddings a month. Here among Kilis’s 14,000, there’s one wedding a month. “We have no respectable jobs, no house, so no girlfriend,” he said. For now, that’s fine with him. He still expects that the revolution will triumph, and he won’t live here long.

Deeb’s friend Milad, 27, is engaged but has postponed his marriage. He also thinks the revolution won’t take much longer. When I asked the woman working at the laundry center in Section C when she thought she might go back to Syria, she said, “Maybe today, maybe tomorrow.” Bakri, the woman who runs the centers, told me she thought they’d stay in camp “a looooongtime,” based on what she has seen about Syria on the news. What did she mean by a long time? Two or three years, she said.

When I asked one teacher, a 20-year-old in a lavender abaya and matching head scarf, if she thought she’d stay long, she shrugged and said, “Ten years?” After that, she’d go live a normal life somewhere. Where? I asked. She shrugged again. “Anywhere.”

If the Syrians end up in the camp for the statistically typical amount of time, her guess was probably the closest. Currently, the number of years a refugee lives in a refugee camp is, on average, 12. And many think that the conflict in Syria is likely to drag on for years. Even as militant groups have proliferated, and sectarian fighting has turned the country into a collection of warring factions, President Bashar al-Assad has announced he is considering running for re-election.

A store outside one of the containers. Many residents have set up businesses in the camp.CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

“We hoped it was one month or two months,” one family told me, as we sat in their trailer. “We wake up, we sleep, we wake up, we sleep, we eat food, we always watch TV to see what’s going on. We’re all very bored. There’s no purpose in a life like this. One day is like another.” The eight of them, from the Idlib countryside, a center of opposition in the north of the country, squirmed to make room for each other as we talked. As dark as their sentiments were, they smiled and gestured cheerfully.

“Our relatives are here,” one of them explained when I commented on their composure. “Life goes on. Maybe we cried for one day, two days, a week; you remember Syria sometimes and cry for it, but after that, what do you do? Life goes on.”

Besides the comforts, and the cleanliness, and the impressive facilities of the Kilis camp, there is one important thing to note: Nobody likes living there.

“It’s hard for us,” said Basheer Alito, the section leader who was so effusive in his praise for the camp and the Turks. “Inside, we’re unhappy. In my heart, it’s temporary, not permanent.”

“What if it was permanent?” I asked him.

Quickly, he answered, “It’s impossible to accept this.”

Rouba Bakri, who told me Kilis was a perfect camp, acknowledged that keeping her spirits up was difficult. “We’re trying our best,” she said. “We’re visiting relatives, volunteering, trying to keep busy. But it is nothing like a home.”

Another Kilis resident, Mahmoud Joundah, agreed. “This is a five-star hotel,” he said. Then with his next breath, “We’re not happy here.”

The U.N.H.C.R.’s Batchelor acknowledges that despite the high level of assistance in the camps, “the emotional protection has become quite a challenge.

“In a noncamp setting,” Batchelor went on to say, “if people are able to keep themselves engaged, that provides a healthy outlook, helps establish local integration, keeps alive their skill sets if they repatriate.” The longer a refugee resides in a camp, the harder it can become to sustain psychological well-being. But camps remain the default solution.

“Refugee camps have become the mechanism to try to control people,” Fabos says. “They prevent them from interacting with your citizenry. There certainly have been cases where refugee camps are places where exiled political movements will train and collect arms and plan attacks. But it’s also the case that refugee camps don’t provide opportunities for livelihood. The aid is very small compared to the actual needs.”

There are rumors, according to the Turkish official — that the government is considering blanket citizenship for the Syrians, who are politically aligned with and likely to vote for the ruling party. (Syrians can apply for citizenship but aren’t given any special treatment; fewer than 800 were granted it last year.) Kirisci, of the Brookings Institution, dismissed the idea.

“No one is going to naturalize one million people.”

When it comes to refugees in camps like Kilis, their relatively comfortable existence might make finding meaningful solutions for them less urgent. “Refugees are not useful if they’re not suffering,” Fabos says. Manuel Herz, a professor of architecture in Switzerland who studies refugee-camp structure, knows well the dangers of building nice camps. Since 1975, Morocco has been occupying a small North African territory called Western Sahara, forcing half its Sahrawi population to flee to camps in Algeria. There they remain. Unlike almost all other host countries, Algeria gave its refugees the right to govern themselves. “There, camp is not a place of suffering and hunger,” Herz says. But the flip side is that “there’s very little pressure for Morocco to withdraw because people are not dying anymore.”

Goods for sale along a main thoroughfare in Kilis. CreditTobias Hutzler for The New York Times

At the October meeting, the U.N.H.C.R. proposed a fourth durable solution: more support for host communities — building up Turkey and Jordan and Lebanon in ways that will survive the immediate conflict, creating jobs by improving infrastructure and lessening competition among locals and refugees for resources and employment. So far, this proposal has not been greeted with enthusiasm, even among countries that pump money into the camp system. Among the Turks, there is talk that the government is considering giving all Syrians the right to work, but it hasn’t yet turned out to be anything but another rumor. In mid-2013, the prime minister and the foreign minister started demanding financial assistance from the international community to keep the camps running and asking other countries to take in refugees.

Though Syrians can now spend long periods massed on the border awaiting entry, in October the Turkish official assured me that regardless of the number of Syrians who arrive, they will be welcome. “We’re not going to kick them out,” he said. “It’s a global responsibility. Even if the war ends tomorrow, they’ll stay two or three more years because there’s no infrastructure at home. We’re prepared for them to stay for a long time.”

Kirisci, who co-wrote a report on the camps late last year, agrees that it’s unlikely the Turks will eject the Syrians or start treating them less hospitably. The Istanbul governor was trying to move urban refugees into camps. But even in the winter cold, they didn’t want to go. After they were forced into one, they kept returning to their spots on the streets. “The refugees are recognizing that they are there to stay and don’t want to risk living open-ended in camp,” Kirisci says. “They’d rather risk living in the wild.”