

The latest migrant disaster, in which thousands are scrambling to reach the EU from Greece, Italy and Hungary, has brought more attention to the tragic issue of refugees trying to cross to Europe. It is estimated that since January 2015, 350,000 refugees have desperately packed onto overcrowded vessels to Italy after fleeing war-torn countries such as Iraq, Syria and Libya. Now, migrants are increasingly using road and rail transport to access the EU. The deaths of 71 migrants who suffocated on board a lorry abandoned in Austria is one of the most recent examples. Thousands of migrants have tried to board trains to Germany from Hungary, forcing Budapest's Eastern Railway station to close.

Source: The Telegraph / Sept. 2015



Photo: Al Jazeera / Sept. 2015

Facing the worst humanitarian catastrophe of our time, Turkey is hosting over 3 million refugees mostly from Syria. Although a few times more than European countries, Turkey is not sheltering largest number of Syrian refugees and fortunately there is not a serious public reaction or unrest against this situation. However, political and economical uneasiness of situation makes things more and more chaotic everyday. Hundred thousands of refugees are living in official refugee camps located near border cities such as Gaziantep. Usually they are supported by government for food, shelter, basic health care and education services. Nevertheless, these camps are not the best places to live for years, and so many refugees try to reach cities to set a life or try a better transition phase to Europe.

Refugees in cities have another type of chaos in their lives. While in camps refugees are in a kind of isolation, in cities real encounters happen between refugees and locals. Syrian refugees are called as "guests" according to the government. Though this approach sounds like warmer response than classifying them as "refugees", creates a legal confusion and makes their official status vaguely lack of legal rights that would come with a refugee classification.

Turkish government promises giving refugees right to work and attend school in future. In Turkey, Syrians usually work illegally, underpaid and in unstable conditions. As employees replace locals with unfairly underpaid Syrian workers, locals increasingly start to complain about the situation which fosters a type of unrest.

In cities, creating fair job and education opportunities for refugees seems like the first priorities along with shelter, food and basic health services while half of the refugees are children.

As Turkish government does not advice birth control for its own citizens, it doesn't have any policy or approach for refugees, neither. Over hundred thousands of Syrian babies were born in Turkey and more than 700.000 children have to access education in Turkey. Many of these children does not speak Turkish and not able to follow curriculum of Turkish primary school system.

Fortunately, not only government but also civil initiatives work for solving problems of refugees. As some of NGOs focus directly on problem area, Syrian cities, some others work for improving situations at camps. Many other humanitarian NGOs also work in cities to help refugees solving their problems. Small Projects Istanbul (SPI) is one of them located in the heart of Istanbul and working hard to create projects improving lives of refugees.

The mission of Small Projects Istanbul (SPI) is to facilitate access to formal education for Syrian refugees through its scholarship fund and to provide supplemental education that will assist students and families to succeed in Turkey and beyond, paving the way for better opportunities in the future. It also coordinates a craft collective for Syrian women to provide livelihood support. While the war rages on, SPI is helping to stop the downward spiral into unemployment and poverty that curtailed education threatens to create for members of what is being called Syria's "lost generation."

Source: Smallprojectsistanbul.org

DESIGN BRIEF

Refugee crisis has several layers. First layer is humanitarian in which people need secure shelters, food and other basic needs but also satisfaction of psychological and social needs. Second layer is more political in which countries show various reactions to the issue and develop plans for integration or isolation.

It is necessary to keep in mind that refugees cannot be unified into a single persona. Syria is a country famous with rich mixture of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, various traditions and expectations. Moreover, human centered solutions should be customized for anthropometric differences, abilities and disabilities. Another crucial point is having a well understanding of the migration process. Refugee are not in a static but dynamic process as fleeing from homeland, staying temporary in a refugee camp for an unknown time, travelling to a destination by boats, buses or simply by walking, temporary living on the streets and other places in cities etc.

Investigate and understand refugee crisis from different perspectives and bring human/user centered solution(s) improving quality of life/or solving particular problem refugees may encounter during migration.

Problems such as lack of shelter, heater, food, information, language disabilities, physical disabilities and social pressure and isolation are potential problem areas, and with a certain complexity, designs shall include any type of product(s), service(s) and systems(s) but not a vehicle or an architectural structure.

In your design process focus on trust and freedom. How strategically trust and freedom plays role in your case. Observe the situation on a specific case from Istanbul, try to understand the role of trust. As Colson (2003) mentions, trust depends on continuing links with a home place or membership, thus refugees take longer to rebuild trust in new surroundings. Breakdown of community structure and the lack of a secure future lead to deep mistrust. Try to understand the roots of mistrust from refugees and towards refugees in our society.

Topics:

- Designing for improving shelters for refugees
- Design for improving educational opportunities and efficiency of education in schools or SPI
- Design for creating job opportunities
- Design health improving or monitoring devices

Organisations: SPI (Small Projects Istanbul), Suriye Okulları Meclisi, AL Awael Okulu, Göçmen Dayanışma Mutfağı, Migrant Solidarity Network, Solidarity in Practice

Colson, E. (2003) Forced migration and the anthropological response, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16 (1), 1-18.