



Myself and a couple of friends decided to spend our Christmas break by travelling on an aid convoy to the European countries to assist the needed refugees as part of a UK charity. At short notice i.e. a week, we requested donations of winter clothing and money for providing food aid. We were pleasantly surprised with the generosity of people. We had accumulated over 70 boxes of clothing and over £11,500 in donations from work colleagues, family, friends and the local community.



We left the UK on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 with 3 vans carrying clothing, blankets and food with our target destination as Macedonia. After a short ferry crossing from Dover to Calais France and then driving approximately 1670 miles over four days through France, Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Serbia we reached Macedonia.



Unfortunately the Macedonian border authorities would not allow our vehicles to enter the country. We decided to leave the vehicles at the border and met with our contact that operates a local charity. The next day we visited the Tabanovce refugee camp in Macedonia close to the Serbian border. The refugees that come to this camp use it as a transit point; they rest here for some hours and then move on. On average about 1000 people pass through this camp on a daily basis. As we did not have access to our vehicles we spent £2300 buying winter clothing like hats, gloves and coats for adults and children. We also donated about £1500 to the local charity which is the only charity at the camp that provides a warm meal of soup and bread. The money will feed approximately 500 people for 10 days.



Serving dinner



Red cross and camp administrator



Serving tea and biscuits

On the 6<sup>th</sup> day we drove to Vienna in Austria, we stopped off at a small refugee centre in the city and donated some of the clothing we brought from the UK and canned food. We then continued to travel to the refugee centre in Salzburg close to the border with Germany. This is the first fully European country the refugees enter. This camp was operated by the Austrian government under the supervision of the army, police and local & international charities. On average 1000 to 1500 new refugees were arriving daily. After staying a day at the camp they would be put on coaches to other European countries.

We donated quite a lot of the clothing we brought from the UK, food, a wheel chair that was donated and £200 worth of medication which we gave to the Red Cross at the camp. We spend the next 2 days helping with the camp staff with receiving new refugees, preparing food, serving food and help the elderly and families with carrying the food between the place where food is served and the dinner hall.



Chocolates for kids

Some of the members of the group setup a stall outside the dinner hall and handed out sweets and toys for the children. I can't explain the electrifying atmosphere when the children received these gifts, their sadness and helpless disappeared and was replaced by smiles, laughter and happiness.

On the final day we went with one of the charities that is responsible for food to the Metro (Mackro in UK) cash and carry, we spend £1020 in buying fruit, drinks and frozen food and another £300 on chocolates and sweets for the children. We also left a donation of almost £3000 to supply chicken for 10 days. The menu is lentils and rice one day, followed by vegetables and rice the next day and on the third day with chicken and rice. They use about 60kg chickens for a meal which costs about £300.



Dinner Line



Dinner Tent



Dinner (lentils and rice with a piece of bread)



Toy stall



Sleeping tent



Refugees arrival registration

We then drove to a refugee centre in Brussels Belgium. This centre has about 300 refugees who come during the day but unfortunately they don't have any sleeping accommodation so most of them sleep on the streets at night. The centre has a number of language areas for teaching English, French and Dutch, a nursery, library, medical area and a clothing section. We had a tour of the facilities and spoke to the staff, all of whom are unpaid volunteers. They explained that recently they had 2 days where they did not have any food to give. We went with them to the local Aldi supermarket and brought them about £800 worth of food and also donation of £500.



Our final day on the way back we went to the refugee camp in Calais France also known as the jungle. This is a place full of about 7000 people living under makeshift tents of plastic sheets, all you see for miles and miles are these plastic shelters. We started to hand-out tea bags, sugar, milk, biscuits and toilet roll but after a short period it got hectic and dangerous because people started to fight for our own safety we closed the vehicles and left the camp. We later found a warehouse where people can hand food and clothing. This was operated by over 100 people mostly from the UK with 3 sections, one for food, another for clothing and one for bedding i.e. tents and blanket.

We got the EuroTunnel back to the UK on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 and still have about £3000 left which we plan to distribute to the refugee centres in Macedonia, Austria and Belgium.

**Thank you all for your support and assistance with this trip without it this trip would not have been possible. Best wishes and kind regards from Mohammed Gulnawaz**