

# BRINGING BIBLES TO REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN TURKEY, MALAYSIA AND THE GULF STATES

*"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt."*

— EXODUS 22:21 (NIV)

**They are fleeing from persecution, war, and famine. They arrive in strange lands far from home with nothing but the clothes on their back. They may have lost family members. They do not know the local language. They are exiles living in a foreign land!**

**Such is the plight of the world's 80 million displaced people, including 26 million refugees.<sup>1</sup>**

In 2019, more than two-thirds of all refugees came from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. Unfortunately, Syria has been the main source country for refugees since 2014 and at the end of 2019, there were 6.6 million Syrian refugees hosted by 126 countries worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

By the way, the term "refugee" was first defined under the 1951 Refugee Convention. It was a response to the first

**A Rohingya refugee prepares her traditional sweets in Malaysia.**

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR 30 June 2020

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International

great refugee crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, World War II, which saw 50 million people displaced worldwide. Fifty years on the United Nations established World Refugee Day on June 20, 2001, through which it brings focus each year to the ongoing plight of refugees.

## TURKEY

**Many Bible Societies are working in countries which host large refugee populations, including Turkey. In fact, this 99% Muslim country hosts more refugees than any other country in the world, including 3.6 million Syrian refugees and 320,000 refugees from other countries, such as Iraq, Iran, and Somalia.**

Syrian refugees are housed in camps managed by a government agency. They receive basic assistance including food, shelter, education, and medical assistance. NGOs are not allowed to work in the camps and any contact the Bible Society of Turkey (BST) has with them is delicate as most of the refugees are non-Christian. However, it is providing some Scriptures and Christian literature in Arabic for them.

BST's principal focus is on partnering with churches to provide Scriptures to Christian refugees. For example, the Armenian Church is looking after the spiritual and physical needs of Armenian refugees from Iraq. The Syriac, Chaldean, and Evangelical churches are also working with refugees of different nationalities. **BST is working to distribute 1,000 Bibles and 1,000 New Testaments in different languages to Christian refugees to bring new hope into their lives.**

"As the descendent of an Armenian family, I grew up with the story of my people who were forced to leave their home and go to Syria where the people opened their homes and their hearts so that my family could start a new life. I now feel very responsible to do something for the Syrian refugees in Turkey. The most precious thing I have to share is the Word of God. This project is very special to me personally."  
— Tamar, General Secretary, BST.



**PRAY THAT GOD WILL ENABLE BST TO REACH AS MANY CHRISTIAN REFUGEES AS POSSIBLE AND FOR PROTECTION AROUND THOSE CARRYING OUT THIS WORK.**

A photograph of a newborn baby sleeping peacefully in a hammock. The baby is wrapped in a patterned blanket and is wearing a light blue outfit. The hammock is suspended by ropes and is set against a background of patterned fabric, likely part of the camp's interior. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a calm and tender atmosphere.

**A Syrian newborn at a refugee camp in Turkey.**

PHOTO CREDIT: EUROPEAN UNION 2016  
- EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
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Two church leaders in the UAE with Scripture booklets for migrant workers.

## GULF STATES

In 2020, it is estimated there were 281 million migrants globally,<sup>3</sup> including millions of migrant workers who have left their home countries to work in other countries. **In the Gulf States there are currently 23 million migrant workers** from countries such as Nepal, India, the Philippines, and Bangladesh working in low-paid work such as the construction industry or as housemaids.

**Migrant workers are often abused by their employers, underpaid and they live in labour camps. They often find themselves in impossible situations and faced with stark choices: abuse or jail, suicide, deportation, or poverty.**

During the pandemic, the number of infections among migrant workers was high due to the living conditions in the congested camps. In Kuwait, the camps were completely ostracised after the government put all camps under total lockdown for four months, with barricades and under police control.

In the midst of all of this the Bible Society in the Gulf (BSG) has been continuing to partner with churches to bring the comfort and hope of God's Word to workers who desperately need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is **distributing Bibles in 60 languages, along with 10,000 copies of a booklet entitled, "Who is Jesus" in nine languages** including Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Tagalog, and Arabic.

<sup>3</sup> UN World Migration Report 2020



“Thank you for giving us 2,000 copies of this booklet. We look forward to distributing them to our 15 prayer cells. Migrant workers have been immensely affected by the pandemic. Churches like ours are really struggling to cater to our members’ spiritual and emotional needs,” one church leader said.

Bible Society recently distributed free Tagalog Bibles to members of the Filipino Language Christian Church, most of whom usually work as either cleaners or housemaids. “We were all so very happy to receive a Bible. We are very poor people and most of us are unable to buy a Bible, especially at the present situation as many of us are jobless,” said Lyothi, a church member.

It also recently ran a training seminar and distributed Bibles at a church called Sharon Ministries. “I want to thank Bible Society for their support, help, and encouragement. The BSG is a blessing not only to me and my church but to all the Christians and churches in Kuwait,” said Prasad, its leader.




**“PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO ARE SUFFERING IN THE LABOUR CAMPS AND TRAPPED IN THESE FOREIGN LANDS. I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO THE BIBLE SOCIETY IN THE GULF AND ALL INTERNATIONAL BIBLE FRIENDS WHO SUPPORT US.” – CHURCH LEADER.**

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**Migrant workers from Asia wait at the bus stop in Doha, Qatar.**





Children in a refugee school waiting to receive Bibles during a distribution.

## MALAYSIA

In Malaysia there are around 180,000 refugees, 86%<sup>4</sup> of whom are from Myanmar, including members of the Rohingya and Chin ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup>

The remainder come from 50 different countries including Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Iraq. There are around 46,000 children who are under the age of 18, many of whom are without parents.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown have had a big impact on Malaysia's refugees. Many businesses have closed, and many people have lost their jobs. The political instability in Myanmar is also contributing to increased mental and emotional stress for the refugees from Myanmar.

The Bible Society of Malaysia is partnering with churches and Christian refugee schools to bring Bibles to

refugees and migrants, particularly children. With an increasing number of children needing to be hosted, the demand for Bibles and Christian literature by the refugee schools is increasing.

It is providing Scriptures and running Bible storytelling sessions at 12 refugee schools, including the Ruth Education Centre and the ElShaddai Refugee Learning Centre. The latter runs a school for children catering up to 1,000 children per day from 18 different countries.

**This year, Bible Society intends to distribute 2,500 Bibles, 5,000 New Testaments and 25,000 portions to individuals and children. It has also established libraries in five schools stocked full of Bibles, children's Bibles, devotionals, and Bible comics.**



**PRAY THAT MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES WILL BE OPEN TO RECEIVING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.**

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance-in-malaysia.html>

Mrs Supporter, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when so many people are suffering it may be easy for us to overlook some of the most vulnerable: the refugees, the migrants, and the migrant workers. Yet, just as Jesus came to heal the sick and to take care of the marginalised, we need to tend to those who are suffering the most during these difficult times.

Will you prayerfully consider taking this opportunity to bring the gift of a Bible, New Testament or portion to a refugee, a migrant, or a migrant worker? In Turkey, your gift could provide a Bible for a Christian refugee. In the Gulf States, your gift could provide a Bible for a migrant worker. In Malaysia, your gift could provide a Bible to a child in a refugee school.

Your gift could help to bring the peace, hope and comfort of the Bible message into the life of a refugee or migrant who otherwise would not receive it.

Thank you and God bless you!

Yours sincerely,



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Neels Janse van Rensburg'.

**Neels Janse van Rensburg**  
CEO

## THE DIFFERENCE YOU'VE MADE!

As a Bible Society supporter, you are part of a mission that is bringing Bibles to many. We want to share with you a special report we received from the Bible Society of Uruguay on its New Horizons programme which our Bible a Month Regular Givers supported between 2017 – 2020. The project involves travelling into the remotest parts of Uruguay to distribute Bibles. To learn more about the

impact gifts made by supporters like you are having go to: [www.biblesociety.org.nz/new-horizons](http://www.biblesociety.org.nz/new-horizons)



**Girl at Syrian refugee camp run by Turkish municipality, Turkey.**

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