



Inter-Agency
Coordination
Türkiye

3RP National Protection Working Group

Situation Overview on Developments in Syria and Implications for the Protection Sector in Türkiye

Date & Place: Thursday, 16 January 2025, 10:00 – 12:30 / Zoom

Moderator: Lara Özügergin – 3RP National Protection Sector Coordinator (UNHCR)

Participants: AAR Japan, ARSA, CARE, Danish Refugee Council, Dünya Doktorları Derneği, ELAF, Expertise France, Genç Hayat Vakfı, Hayata Destek, HEVİ LGBTİ Derneği, Human Appeal, ICMC, ICMPD, IKGV, IOM, Kaos GL, Kırkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doğa Derneği, Maya Vakfı, MESEDER, MSYDD, MUDEM, Mülteci Hakları Merkezi, Mülteciler Derneği, Qatar Charity, REALs, Relief International, RET International, Save the Children, SEVKAR, SGDD-ASAM, SHAFAK, Türk Kızılay, UN Women, UNHCR, UNICEF, Violet Organization, World Human Relief, Yeryüzü Çocukları Derneği, YSYD

The 3RP National Protection Working Group Meeting focusing on the developments in Syria since December 8 and the potential impacts on the Protection Sector response was held on January 16, 2025. This meeting aimed to identify the needs of refugees and protection sector partners, as well as to assess the priorities of the protection sector and potential preparedness activities in the context of ongoing self-organized returns.

UNHCR Key Messages and Updates

Procedural Updates on Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) Voluntary Returns & Permitted Exit-Entry Processes

- UNHCR Policy Development Unit provided information on the current voluntary return procedures, as well as permitted exits and entries. The Ministry of Interior's statements regarding the increase in voluntary returns after December 8, 2024, compared to the previous period can be accessed through this [link](#). According to the statement, 52,622 Syrians voluntarily returned in the past month. Of these returnees, 9,729 were from families, representing a total of 41,437 individuals, while the remaining 11,185 were individual returnees.
- Information was provided on the procedures to be followed for voluntary returns. The relevant announcement of the PMM can be accessed via this [link](#). Specifically, making an appointment at the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) in the province where individuals are registered prior to initiating the voluntary return process was emphasized in order to avoid any delays at the border crossings. At the PDMMs, voluntary returns forms are filled in and travel permits are issued. Temporary Protection IDs will be taken back at the border crossing. Even if the appointments system for PDMMs are established, Syrian nationals can still approach border crossings directly for voluntary return. In relation to voluntary returns, UNHCR continues its monitoring interviews in 12 provinces and at border gates.
- It is expected that the procedures for exit and entry with permission will remain in place between January 1, 2025, and July 1, 2025. Details of the relevant announcement can be checked via this [link](#). Those heads of households wishing to travel temporarily to Syria to observe the situation will be allowed to exit and enter up to three times during this period. Exit and enter must be made through the same border crossing. Only the head of the household is permitted to travel and in case the head of household cannot travel, an adult family member may exit and enter. Additionally, such temporary visits can only be processed at the PDMMs through appointments and direct approach to border crossings for temporary visits is not allowed during these exits and entries.



■ Question & Answer Session:

- A woman who is in the process of divorce from her husband finds that her husband is going to Syria (via permitted exit/entry procedure) before her. The woman also wants to follow the permitted exit/entry procedure, but only one family member is allowed to do so per announced procedures. In this case, how can the woman return? Can she present her divorce proceeding documents? If the divorce is not finalized, will she still be able to exit and enter with permission?

Mentioned exit of the head of household or adult family member is only valid for permitted exit and entry. However, for voluntary return, all family members can be included in the process. If a divorce has occurred and a voluntary return is planned, the files of the individuals will be separated in the PMM system, and they will be considered as separate families. For permitted exit and entry, it is important to assess the progress of the divorce case in Türkiye and whether the divorce can be finalized. For instance, there are cases that certain family members including the head of household may have traveled to third countries, previously returned to Syria, or are not in Türkiye. PMM evaluates these on a case-by-case basis. Any questions regarding voluntary return or permitted exit and entry can be directed to the YİMER 157 hotline.

- What is your observation regarding families with children continuing education? Are they returning or waiting?

We see both, while some families wait until the end of the semester or academic year, others have opted for return.

- After the recent developments, what is your observation regarding voluntary return requests from the Removal Centers?

It is important to remember that voluntary return is a concept of refugee law, so these procedures are valid for temporary protection beneficiaries. The people detained in the Removal Centers do not fall under this category, and their return procedures are different. The returns from the Removal Centers take place as per other provisions of the legislation.

- What is the voluntary return procedure for unregistered individuals; are they expected to approach the PDMMs where they are residing or to the border gates? Also, if a registered individual is residing in a province other than his/her registration province, where would they get the appointment?

They would be able to make the appointments at their registered provinces from randevu.goc.gov.tr; and they can also approach border crossings. The unregistered individuals should approach the PDMMs where they are staying. They can also directly approach to the border crossings where they will also be registered and issued with the relevant forms and documents. Considering the capacities and increasing numbers, PMM wants to systemize the appointment mechanism which would also protect people from travelling without permission and waiting at the border crossings for completion of procedures due to missing documentation or other similar reasons.

Key Messages Regarding Current Situation

- 3RP Education Sector Coordinator highlighted that the education sector is working on various scenarios. Issues such as the integration of the education system in Syria, issues related to documentation from Türkiye, language courses, and infrastructure problems are being discussed. More detailed information will be shared in sector meetings and partners who wish to become a member of the sector can access the sector's contact information through this [page](#).

- The document outlining UNHCR's position on the current situation can be accessed through this [link](#). Currently, UNHCR is not encouraging mass voluntary returns. In relation to voluntary returns, the needs of PDMM and some operational needs of refugees are being identified.

UNHCR Key Messages on Communication with Communities

- UNHCR Communication with Communities Unit prepared a dedicated section in both Arabic and English featuring frequently asked questions (FAQs) and their validated answers regarding recent developments in Syria and voluntary returns, which has been incorporated into the UNHCR Help Page. These sections provide comprehensive and up-to-date information to assist Syrian refugees and partners in understanding the evolving situation. The relevant page can be accessed [here](#). The FAQs and verified responses in the dedicated help pages are organized into four categories: Civil matters, Temporary protection-related matters, UNHCR-related information, such as resettlement, and Movement procedures. Questions sent by partners through the Inter-Agency Question Log are also regularly shared with the Communication with Communities Unit and other relevant units. Questions received through the Inter-Agency Question Log will be incorporated into the Help Page as well.

Key Updates on the 3RP Türkiye Chapter for 2025

- The 3RP Inter-Sector Coordinator stated that the coordination of voluntary returns will be carried out under the 3RP framework at both Türkiye and regional levels. The 3RP Durable Solutions Working Group will be re-activated and will be an inter-sectoral platform. Although this working group will operate with fewer participants, sector coordinators will convey the needs or requests identified within their respective sectoral groups to this platform.
- An additional appeal for the 3RP Türkiye chapter for 2025 is currently under consideration and is expected to be launched in March.
- Furthermore, updating operational contingency plans in light of the changing context is also on the agenda.
- In the coming months, communication with partners will continue to determine sectoral priorities and assess potential additional funding needs beyond the 3RP 2025 framework.

3RP Information Management Tools

- **Question Log:** A question log has been developed to help partners consolidate and share questions received from stakeholders concerning voluntary returns to Syria. This tool aims to serve as a centralized resource for managing and addressing frequently encountered questions; provide, where possible, a clearer understanding of the most pressing concerns from various stakeholders; and harmonize inter-agency communication with communities practices by improving accuracy of messaging and enhancing evidence-based decision-making. Questions can be shared via the relevant tool through this [link](#).
- **Services Advisor in Syria (For referrals from Türkiye):** The webpage featuring the mapping of services in Syria can be accessed through this [link](#). This mapping platform is expected to expand in time once more service providers become operational in Syria.
- **Community Pulse Survey Exercise:** Given the sensitivity of the current situation and to avoid creating anxiety and perception among refugees that they are expected to return to Syria as soon as possible, UNHCR is promoting a coordinated and unified approach to undertaking intention surveys. Therefore, an inter-agency intention survey, named Community Pulse, is planned to collectively identify the needs and expectations of individuals who prefer to stay in Türkiye for various reasons or are considering returning voluntarily. This survey, targeting Syrians, will be conducted with a smaller sample size compared to the 3RP Inter-Agency Protection Needs Assessment. As the survey will need to be carried out regularly, the data

collection cycles are tentatively scheduled for February, May, August (through the Inter-Agency Protection Needs Assessment), and at the end of the year, with results to be shared with participating organizations. The Community Pulse survey will be methodologically adapted to the Türkiye context, enabling comparisons with regional analyses. Feedback on the questionnaire will be gathered from partners in the coming days, with official data collection expected to commence towards end of January. This initiative aims to establish a general situational analysis, with further detailed studies encouraged at later stages for specific needs groups. While the Community Pulse Survey is designed as a quantitative initiative, UNHCR's Inter-Agency Coordination Unit is also exploring establishing a question bank to support partners' individual qualitative data collection initiatives.

Partner Observations on Protection Risks and Concerns

During the meeting, partners shared their observations on protection risks and concerns relevant to the current context. These outcomes are presented below under thematic headings:

Missing Person Identification:

- Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) Family Reunification Unit provided information on the procedures to be followed regarding missing person identification.
- The responsible entity to initiate and follow missing person identification processes is the ICRC. To this end, the ICRC Delegation in Damascus has established a WhatsApp channel for reporting cases and submitting identification requests. The relevant communication channels are shared below.
- **Information Channels:**
 - Family Unification Telephone Lines within Syria (Sunday to Thursday during working hours):
 - Communication and family reunification support for former detainees: 0953555431
 - Families searching for their relatives: 0936033628
 - Front Office for Requests from Abroad:
 - New missing person identification requests (accessible via WhatsApp): +41 79642 7594
- Individuals who cannot reach the ICRC Damascus Delegation via the phone numbers listed above can send their specific questions (excluding personal data) to dam_tracing_services@icrc.org
- TRC will not carry out a role or responsibility in family reunification or missing person identification processes. However, upon request, TRC can provide a “Detention Certificate/Indictment” For individuals who were previously detained in Syria and came to Türkiye. These documents may be requested by these individuals or by their first-degree relatives (Turkish citizens and/or foreign nationals), by emailing the [TRC Family Reunification Unit](#).

Information Needs:

- A partner shared that they received information regarding payment requests for individuals attempting to cross into Syria. certain payments may be required as part of customs procedures, it was mentioned that this issue should be specifically monitored due to the absence of regulations. Partners are recommended to call the YIMER hotline for clarity on the matter. A partner also shared that Syrians with Turkish citizenship are required to make a payment of 420 USD upon entry into Syria and are only allowed to stay for a limited number of days, which may lead them to attempt to enter Syria from different countries. In response, the UNHCR Policy Development Unit clarified that the voluntary return procedure is only applicable

to individuals under temporary protection (Syrian nationals or stateless persons and Palestinians who came from Syria and are under temporary protection), and Syrians who have acquired Turkish citizenship are not included within this scope.

- Partners shared that false information is being circulated about closure of container cities after July 1 (the time frame for permitted exit and entry) and that individuals would need to apply for paid residence permits starting from this date.
- Social media is being used as a primary source of information, but there are issues with verification and reliability. It has been reported that refugees are afraid their applications to PDMM will be misunderstood as a voluntary return request, and as a result, they are hesitant to apply to PDMM.
- Some Syrians who expressed insecurity regarding permitted exit and entry are concerned that they may not be able to return to Türkiye. These individuals have fears such as, 'If I say I have a house in Syria, will they ask me why I came back to Türkiye?'. It has been reported that there may have been individual cases where those who left with permission were unable to return. However, since this information has not been confirmed, it may be inaccurate and it has been suggested that these individuals may have left before the end of December. Therefore, monitoring whether these individuals can return or not will be important.
- There is general uncertainty regarding information needs both within the refugee community and among partners. Partners recommend that local authorities should play a more active role in addressing information needs of refugees and protection partners, and to this end efforts should be made to enhance their capacity.
- Partners are encouraged to respond to questions received from refugees based on verified data and information shared at the inter-agency level. However, unanswered questions should be forwarded to the Inter-Agency Question Log. Partners reported that common inquiries involved financial aid, general assistance, and legal and administrative processes related to voluntary returns. Topics such as housing, safe shelter, and security concerns were also highlighted. Many questions were received from women regarding gender-based violence and gender inequality in Syria. Additionally, caregivers of persons with disabilities continue to express concerns regarding access to health and specialized services. It was noted that these individuals often rely on information from their relatives in Syria regarding medicine and their prices, and that access to health services is a key factor affecting their decision to return.

Situation and Needs at Border Gates

- One of the partners reported that a visit was held to the Karkamış border gate in the past weeks. Accommodation was needed for individuals whose procedures could not be completed on the same day and the PMM provided support in this regard. However, in cases where the PMM in Hatay did not provide referrals for accommodation, protection needs increase. Partners conveyed that internal discussions are taking place on what type of support can be provided in similar situations.
- Accommodation is a priority need particularly for individuals who are not permitted to cross the border. These individuals often arrive with all their belongings, causing difficulties in returning to their place of residence. It was mentioned that the housing capacity in Hatay Cilvegözü is quite limited and is managed through NGOs with a small quota.
- Access for persons with disabilities (such as those arriving with wheelchairs) at border gates is also a significant challenge.

Persons with Specific Needs:



- Observations regarding persons with specific needs and disabilities indicate that they have significant concerns about returning to Syria. Persons with disabilities are reluctant to return due to their need for assistive devices, the requirement for continuous access to health services, and the uncertainty surrounding the health system in Syria.
- Partners informed that they revised screening and individual assessment tools to better understand the concerns and views of individuals regarding returns to Syria. These questions are not intended to encourage returns, but rather to identify current needs.

Child Protection and Education:

- Issues persist in the voluntary return process, particularly concerning separated children, where no guardianship documents are available. In cases where the primary caregivers are in Syria or the children are being cared for by extended family members, many children have incomplete custody/guardianship processes. Participants anticipate that the number of such cases will increase.
- Families considering return are at risk of having their children removed from school. Additionally, many questions have been received regarding the educational certificate of equivalence.
- Desire to return is lower among children and youth compared to adults and older persons which leads to disagreements within families.
- Some families who are returning or considering return are leaving or are willing to leave their children behind in Türkiye. Problems related to the border crossing of children, especially in single-parent households, have also been noted. For instance, if there is a deceased parent, obtaining a death certificate is required. However, due to the difficulty in obtaining these documents, individuals are unable to process their return requests at the borders. Therefore, the approach to be followed in this situation needs to be discussed. Additionally, significant problems with obtaining letters of parental consent (muvafakatname) are reported, and partners observe differences in practice in this regard.
- Persons express concerns about returning, particularly regarding requests for return or exit and entry with permission after the closure of schools. It is anticipated that there will be congestion at the border gates due to the school closures. Extending the deadline for exit and entry with permission (July 1), based on the date of school closure, may help address the demands of the individuals.

Legal Assistance:

- In response to the question regarding the implementation of the Union of Türkiye Bar Associations (UTBA)-UNHCR legal aid project, it was stated that the legal aid component carried out under the UNHCR-UTBA cooperation will continue in 2025. Protocols are currently being made between UTBA and the bar associations that will participate in this framework. Once the protocols are completed, case submissions will be possible through the system. The legal clinics continue to provide services as before.
- UNICEF and the UTBA have a joint legal aid project called the Legal Empowerment, Aid, and Protection (LEAP) Programme for Children and Families Affected by the Earthquake. Anyone affected by the earthquake can apply for legal aid under this program for cases and applications related to children. The provinces covered by the program include Adana, Adıyaman, Ankara, Antalya, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Mersin, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa. However, the legal aid component of the program is currently active



in 11 out of 14 pilot provinces¹ (except for Elazığ, Ankara, and Osmaniye), and scope of the program continues as in previous periods. Additionally, the mobile legal outreach component (YASA Truck) currently also provides legal counseling to beneficiaries in Şanlıurfa. The lineage related legal applications and lawsuits, and custody and guardianship applications are covered including the DNA test fees. Therefore, TPID holders who wish to return voluntarily but cannot proceed due to custody/guardianship issues can be referred to the Bar Associations of the mentioned provinces and benefit from legal aid services for these challenges.

Basic Needs, Cash-Based Interventions and Livelihoods:

- Regarding cash assistance, UNHCR is not currently promoting large-scale voluntary returns, and therefore, specific cash assistance for return is not being discussed. However, requests for logistical support are being received, and efforts are underway to explore possible solutions. Partners who would like to engage in more detailed discussions on this issue, particularly related to cash for protection, are invited to attend the Cash-Based Interventions Technical Working Group meeting scheduled for January 28. Registration form: <https://forms.office.com/e/31Qy5hm7MY>
- Partners observed that due to economic concerns, certain families face situations where the primary financial contributor stays in Türkiye while the rest of the family returns to Syria voluntarily.
- Requests for relocation and transportation support are being raised frequently. Some Syrians noted that they would consider returning to Syria if transportation support is provided. Additionally, partners continue to receive questions about real estate (immovable assets).

Recommendations for the 3RP Protection Sector

- 3RP National Protection Working Group will continue to regularly share information with partners via email regarding their information needs and procedural updates. Information dissemination efforts should focus on utilizing various channels to provide refugees with relevant, reliable, and accessible information about conditions in their areas of origin. A comprehensive communications strategy should be developed and implemented to ensure consistent messaging about voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. It is essential to emphasize that returning to the country of origin is an individual choice.
- Various trainings should be organized considering the sensitivity of the issue and the fact that it is a newly emerging situation. Regarding this issue, the 3RP National Protection Sector Coordinator will contact the relevant units within UNHCR.
- Partners are strongly encouraged to increase their capacity in provision of legal counseling and assistance. This issue should be taken into consideration, especially within the scope of the 3RP additional appeal.

¹ Contact Information:

- Adana Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 322 359 22 24
- Adiyaman Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 416 216 13 51 / 0 533 350 95 59
- Antalya Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 535 106 80 76
- Diyarbakır Bar Association Legal Aid Center 444 78 21
- Gaziantep Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 342 230 63 72
- Hatay Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 326 215 18 77
- Kahramanmaraş Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 344 211 11 27
- Kilis Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 348 813 49 76
- Malatya Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 422 326 28 70
- Mersin Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 324 337 45 30-31
- Şanlıurfa Bar Association Legal Aid Center 0 414 313 28 28



- Partners note that there will be a significant population in Türkiye that will not consider returning. Therefore, the Protection Sector should continue to consider those who will remain in Türkiye in planning and programming processes.
- Host countries should not suspend or terminate protection programs for Syrians considering some vulnerable groups (e.g. women, gender-related profiles, and persons with concerns about the new authorities) will still need protection even if conditions in Syria change.
- Strengthening protection screening and the early identification of concerns and referrals, particularly concerning family separation and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) is critical for preparedness. Advocacy and dialogue with the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) and the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) are essential in addressing these issues.
- Coordinated focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys should be undertaken. This includes conducting FGDs with refugees to understand the reasons behind intended, ongoing, or past returns and to identify areas conducive to return, as well as regularly conducting intention surveys to track the evolving motivations for returns.
- To maintain ongoing dialogue on conditions in countries of origin and prospects for return, existing feedback, complaint, and response mechanisms should be accessible and available for effective utilization.
- Protection monitoring efforts should be strengthened to identify and address protection-related concerns. Support and advocacy efforts should focus on the feedback received from protection partners and the regular sharing of situation analyses with UNHCR to ensure they are incorporated into ongoing advocacy efforts.
- Operational engagement and coordination efforts should focus on collaborating with key partners and donors to develop communication strategies, strengthen preparedness actions in line with the 3RP strategy, and contribute to updates of contingency plans as a sector.