

# Recent developments in Syria inspire thousands of refugees to return home

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Mr Filippo Grandi visited Türkiye to discuss how best to support Syrian refugees who are voluntarily returning home.



*UN High Commissioner Mr Filippo Grandi, accompanied by the President of Migration Management Mr. Atilla Toros and UNHCR Türkiye Representative Ms. Angela Li Rosi during the visit to Türkiye on 27 January.*

## Highlights

With the [recent political developments in Syria](#) leading to a cautious sense of improved security, some refugees aspire to [return home](#) and join their friends and families. Since the fall of the regime in Syria on 8 December, **some 81,576 people** have reportedly voluntarily returned to Syria from Türkiye, which continues to host over 3 million people in need of international protection, including 2.87 million Syrians.

The Government of Türkiye has taken special measures for authorized temporary [Go and See visits](#) to Syria for an initial period of 6 months, [until the end of June 2025](#). Temporary visits will facilitate [informed decisions](#) regarding return to Syria and help concerned individuals prepare the ground for final returns.

Mr Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, reaffirmed [UNHCR's commitment to supporting Türkiye](#), home to one of the world's largest refugee populations, as he concluded a two-day visit to the country. On 28 January, the High Commissioner paid a courtesy visit to the Vice President Mr. Cevdet Yılmaz and met with the Minister of Interior, Mr. Ali Yerlikaya and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Burhanettin Duran. He also briefed the diplomatic community and UNCT and hosted a press conference. ([Press Release](#)).

# Recent Developments

## National

- On 4 February, Interim President of Syria Mr Ahmad Al-Sharaa visited Türkiye at the invitation of Turkish President Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, marking his second international visit after Saudi Arabia. In a joint press conference, President Erdoğan reaffirmed Türkiye's support to facilitate the voluntary return of Syrian refugees. ([Learn more](#)).
- The Government of Türkiye approved go-and-see visits starting from 1 January until the end of June 2025 to help Syrian refugees, as well as Syrians with residence permit and those who acquired Turkish citizenship make an informed decision about voluntary return. Syrians using the temporary visit option will retain their TP status, as was the case for the previous Eid visits.
- Türkiye's Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) bureaus will be established at the Turkish Embassy and Consulate in Damascus and Aleppo.
- In December, the Ministry of Interior and PMM organized two meetings with civil society organizations and discussed the principles of safe, dignified, and voluntary returns for Syrians. PMM is setting up working groups on various aspects, including education, security, economy, health, social assistance, social dynamics (e.g., agriculture, housing, nutrition, youth, women, children), development (e.g., industry, infrastructure, water, energy, transportation), and governance dynamics (e.g., administration, aid, consular matters, documentation issues) to focus on supporting Syria in the short and longer-term.
- A decrease was observed in the number of Syrians intercepted or rescued during attempted irregular departures at the western borders. According to authorities, from 1 to 31 December 2024, a total of 188 Syrians were intercepted or rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG), representing a 73% decrease compared to the previous month.

## Regional

- As of 5 February, UNHCR estimates that some 270,000 Syrians have returned to Syria, including over 81,000 refugees from Türkiye, since 8 December 2024. These figures are based on a triangulation of sources from outside and inside Syria and include refugees registered with UNHCR and other Syrians returning from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, as well those transiting from beyond the region.

## Global

- On 27 January, the European Union foreign ministers agreed on "a roadmap to ease the EU sanctions on Syria" related to energy and transport, as these two sectors are "necessary for economic stabilization and economic reconstruction of Syria".

# Protection Assistance & Advocacy

## Protection and Access to Services

UNHCR identifies the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers through **protection assessments**, leading to further referrals and assistance. In January, UNHCR conducted assessments for **2,173 individuals**. At the same time, the protection assessments of 1,063 individuals were reviewed and finalized. The refugees identified as having specific needs were referred to appropriate authorities and partners for specific services.

In January, UNHCR counselled and supported **1,263 refugees**, including nearly 400 cases relating to administrative detention and 870 cases relating to negative decisions on asylum applications.

UNHCR continued to provide various types of assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees. In January, UNHCR supported **159 individuals with medical assistance** through the contracted clinic and 170 individuals with medicines through contracted pharmacies. Through the contracted hotel, urgent accommodation assistance was provided to 27 individuals, and 817 individuals received transportation assistance related to urgent protection needs.

During the first month of 2025, UNHCR provided cash assistance to **2,536 vulnerable refugees**, primarily survivors of gender-based violence.

### Access to Territory and Asylum Procedures

In January, UNHCR delivered **14,031 core relief items**, including water, hygiene items, baby food and clothing for over 2,000 beneficiaries through the border authorities and Gendarmerie in İzmir, Aydın, Balıkesir, Muğla, Çanakkale, Edirne and Kırklareli to address the basic needs of individuals who were rescued (or apprehended and intercepted).

### Legal Aid and Legal Assistance

UNHCR, in partnership with the Union of the Turkish Bar Associations (UTBA), supports six legal clinics (LCs) to provide legal assistance and legal counselling services to refugees and asylum-seekers in Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Van, Hatay, Kilis and Malatya, including in Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs) and removal centres (RCs). In January, these six LCs provided **legal assistance to 784 refugees and asylum-seekers** (including 141 individuals in removal centres) in 1,067 cases of civil law, exit and re-entry procedures, detention, access to rights, family reunification, re-issuing identity cards, queries related to resettlement and civil law, and consumer and rent laws. In addition, the LCs carried out various **outreach activities**. The legal clinics in Hatay and Şanlıurfa conducted **6 awareness sessions** for nearly 200 refugees on various legal topics, including voluntary return procedures.

## Support for Solutions

### Voluntary Returns

UNHCR supported PMM's new corporate **app named GöçBil** released on [Google Play](#), and [App Store](#) in January. The app allows users, among other things, to access PMM appointment services, apply for voluntary return, and contact the PMM call centre (YIMER).



Logo of PMM's new corporate app named

In view of the developments in Syria and the increase in processing capacity at border crossings, UNHCR continued to enhance its monitoring of voluntary returns in 12 provinces, at four border crossing points, and at Istanbul Airport. In January, UNHCR, in cooperation with the Justice Academy of Türkiye, organized two roundtable consultations and training in Istanbul and Izmir with 85 participants, primarily judges, along with lawyers, Istanbul PDMM staff, and academics. The consultation covered several areas of civil law matters commonly faced by refugees. The participants also discussed the requirements for civil documentation in the voluntary return procedures.

### Resettlement

UNHCR continues to expedite **resettlement processing** for the most vulnerable refugees. In January 2025, a total of 197 resettlement submissions were made (14,400 in 2024), most of which were for refugees from Syria in the earthquake-affected region. In January, 725 refugees departed to third countries (10,650 in 2024), including USA, Germany, Canada, France and the Netherlands.

### Education

Through the German Albert Einstein Refugee Academic Initiative (DAFI) programme, UNHCR has been providing scholarships for refugee students globally for over twenty years. The DAFI programme was introduced in Türkiye in 2014 and implemented through partnership with the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). The DAFI scholarship covers the academic tuition fees, accommodation, books and living expenses in the country of asylum. Scholarships are awarded for undergraduate programmes between two and four years, and the award is renewed annually based on satisfactory academic performance. Besides the DAFI scholarships, UNHCR also assists refugee students with cash grants to partially cover their higher education expenses. In 2024, **a total of 2,467 students** were supported, including 1,792 students through DAFI scholarships, and 675 students received higher education cash grants provided by UNHCR.

## Livelihoods

To strengthen the capacity of the **Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR)** in providing service for refugees, 19 interpreters supported by UNHCR continued their service in Istanbul, Izmir, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Bursa, Kocaeli, Konya and Hatay. The interpreters are supporting İŞKUR staff in the referral, counselling, and job placement for refugees. In addition to the interpreters, two project staff and one software developer engaged in enhancing the services of İŞKUR.

On 1 February, the Government of Türkiye published the National Employment Strategy (NES) for 2025-2028. The strategy aims to expand decent work opportunities, enhance social welfare, and strengthen economic competitiveness by addressing structural labour market challenges. The strategy emphasizes the integration of vulnerable groups, including refugees, by reducing informal employment, fostering skills development, and promoting their participation in the labour market through comprehensive action plans. UNHCR remains committed to working closely with relevant authorities through various measures to encourage labour market participation.

## Social Cohesion

On 29 January, UNHCR, with support from the **FC Barcelona Foundation (FCB)** and in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, organized the second friendly sports tournament between children from refugee and host community in Manisa (near Izmir). During the event, **210 children** from refugee and host community played friendly games in their respective sports branches. The project, which began in February 2024, aims to support peace and protection for refugee and host community youth through sports. Two friendly tournaments have been organized so far. The first tournament took place in October 2024, where over **500 children participated** in friendly matches of basketball, football, volleyball, and handball. Prior to the tournaments, the children received sports training in various sports branches. The trainers received child protection training and as well as conflict management training.



*Participants of the sports event with children from refugee and host community in Manisa on 29 January.*

## Inter-Agency Coordination

UNHCR co-leads **the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP)**, the regional coordination platform for the refugee response. Within this framework, UNHCR also chairs the Protection and Basic Needs sectors and the Information Management working group.

On 29 January, the Inter-Agency Coordination Unit facilitated the first meeting of the revived **Durable Solutions Working Group**. This working group serves as an Inter-Agency coordination platform to discuss recent developments in Syria and their implications for the refugee response in Türkiye and **voluntary returns to Syria**.

On 30 January, UNHCR organised a consultation with the Heads of Agencies of partner NGOs and UN Agencies to discuss the current cooperation with the Government of Türkiye in monitoring voluntary returns.

*UNHCR is grateful to the donors for unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the refugee response. UNHCR in Türkiye is also thankful to donors who are contributing to 2024 programmes. For more details: UNHCR Türkiye Funding Update – 2024.*