

Syrian refugees continue returning home while millions are still in Türkiye - in need of support

Without stable financial support, critical assistance programs are at risk, affecting refugees, both those who wish to return and those who remain in Türkiye.



A Syrian refugee family returning home through the Cilvegözü Border Crossing Point in Türkiye. Photo: Emrah Gürel/UNHCR

Highlights

- Several activities of UNHCR in Türkiye will be severely impacted as of June 2025 due to the significant budget reductions and freeze.
- Since the fall of the Assad regime, as of 14 March 2025, UNHCR estimates that approximately 354,900 Syrian refugees have returned to Syria via neighbouring countries, including **145,639 individuals who have returned from Türkiye (as of 16 March)**. A decrease in the average number of returns was observed during the first week of March, likely due to the commencement of Ramadan and the escalating hostilities across Syria.
- UNHCR conducts focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugees who have travelled to Syria under the go-and-see visits authorized by the Turkish government. For those considering a permanent return, the primary motivator continues to be the fall of the regime.
- From 10 to 12 March, a delegation from UNHCR in Syria, led by Mr. Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, UNHCR Representative in Syria, visited Türkiye and met with authorities, UN agencies, humanitarian partners and the international community to discuss ways to collaborate on the voluntary return of refugees and strengthening the re-integration process for returnees.
- On 11 February, UNHCR briefed 24 representatives from 19 diplomatic missions on its operational framework for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and ongoing priorities for 2025, in cooperation with Turkish authorities and other partners.

Recent Developments

National

- In 2024, UNHCR Türkiye received only 36 per cent of its required funding. The funding shortage forced UNHCR to make difficult trade-offs in institutional support, impacting refugee protection initiatives and inclusion efforts. In the first months of 2025, UNHCR faces new challenges stemming from economic pressures, rising costs, and the U.S. funding freeze, further straining an already underfunded operation.
- Mr. Hüseyin Kök, the new President of the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), affirmed Türkiye's enhanced efforts to facilitate the voluntary, safe, dignified, and orderly return of Syrians. This includes increased border processing capacity and go-and-see visits to assist returnees in preparing for housing, work, and education. ([Learn more](#)).

Regional

- On 19 February, a rubber dinghy carrying individuals attempting to cross to Greece irregularly capsized off the coast of Kuşadası, Aydın. Operations initiated by the Turkish Coast Guard rescued 27 people alive. Tragically, authorities found the remains of six deceased individuals (three women and three children).
- On 10 February, the Syrian Consulate General commenced passport processing in Türkiye, providing urgent passports (two-day processing) and regular passports (30 to 45 days), along with one-time travel documents for Syrians lacking documentation.

Global

- The Standing Committee meeting of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme took place in Geneva from 11 to 13 March. During the meeting, Türkiye was commended for generously hosting refugees and facilitating go-and-see visits to facilitate well-informed decision-making about voluntary return of Syrian refugees.
- On 18 February, during the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Türkiye, the [Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska visited the Eryaman Child Homes Site in Ankara](#), together with the Turkish First Lady Emine Erdoğan and the Turkish Minister of Family and Social Services Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş.
- UNHCR facilitated visits from delegations of EU, ECHO, Ireland, Denmark, Korea, Sweden, France and the UK to the southeast of Türkiye and to Istanbul. During these visits, the delegations inquired about the ongoing voluntary return processes, the situation for children born or raised in Türkiye, and the monitoring exercise and humanitarian response being carried out by UNHCR and its partners, including refugee-led organisations. Several delegations showed particular interest regarding the support to the people with specific needs. UNHCR expressed gratitude to the delegations for their contributions and support for refugees in Türkiye.

Protection Assistance & Advocacy

Protection and Access to Services

In February, UNHCR conducted protection assessments for 645 cases/2,427 individuals. Among them, 105 females and 45 males were identified as survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). UNHCR counselled and intervened in 1,153 cases involving administrative detention and negative government decisions on asylum applications.

In February 2025, UNHCR supported 1,972 vulnerable individuals with cash assistance. The recipients included GBV survivors and adolescents discharged from state dormitories. UNHCR is currently reassessing its Cash for Protection Programme for 2,533 beneficiaries. The cash assistance programme will be discontinued as of June 2025 due to funding shortage.

UNHCR provided in-kind assistance such as medical support through the contracted clinic for 142 individuals and the contracted pharmacy for 160 individuals. Urgent accommodation assistance

was provided to 17 individuals through the contracted hotel, and 664 individuals received transportation assistance.

On 27 February, as part of the International Women's Day series of events led by the Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality's Women and Family Department, UNHCR delivered a GBV awareness session for 15 women, including Turkish and Syrians, at the Ahmet Yesevi Women's Centre operated by the Municipality. The session covered key topics including the definition and types of GBV; international and national resources for GBV prevention; and complaints and support/response mechanisms in Türkiye, with a focus on Şanlıurfa.



GBV awareness-raising session in Şanlıurfa.

UNHCR supports the MoFSS by providing human resources and technical support to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable individuals in social services. In January 2025, 167 staff provided by UNHCR assisted Social Service Centres across 29 provinces, aiding over 10,000 refugees with counselling and other services. Furthermore, through the support of 39 staff at women's guesthouses and the violence prevention and monitoring Centre (ŞÖNİMs) in 21 provinces, 1,258 women and children benefited from services at ŞÖNİMs, along with 60 women and children accommodated in women's guesthouses.

Access to Territory and Asylum Procedures

From 17 to 21 February, as part of the EU-funded Project on reinforcement, a five-day training was conducted in Ankara for the relevant PMM staff to support the processing of international protection status determination. The training focused on interviewing techniques, credibility assessment, and legal analysis, including practical sessions. Since 2022, 85 PMM/PDMM staff have benefitted from these training sessions.

To support the PDMM's backlog reduction with quality, fair, and efficient refugee status determination and case processing, two PMM staff members and two UNHCR staff joined the Mobile Decision Unit missions in Nevşehir and Ankara, alongside the PDMM staff. During the missions, PMM and UNHCR personnel observed interviews conducted by caseworkers, organised case discussion sessions, and provided feedback on their complex cases.

In February, UNHCR and its partners delivered 7,394 core relief items, including baby food, water, hygiene products, and clothing, to over 1,150 beneficiaries through the border authorities and Gendarmerie in İzmir, Balıkesir, Muğla, Edirne, and Kırklareli, addressing 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) that offer legal assistance and counselling services to refugees and asylum-seekers in Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Van, Hatay, Kilis, and Malatya, including those in Temporary Accommodation Centres and removal centres. In February, these six LCs provided legal assistance to 696 refugees and asylum-seekers (including 134 individuals in removal centres) for 1,010 cases involving civil law, exit and re-entry procedures, detention, family reunification, re-issuing identity cards, and queries related to resettlement and civil law, among others.

TBB App, an online automation system, developed under the UNHCR-UTBA partnership and utilized by Bar Associations (BAs), became operational on 27 January with participation of 56 BAs from 55 provinces this year. Since its re-launch, a total of 564 submissions have been entered into the automation system until 12 February by the various Bar Associations.

Support for Solutions

Voluntary Returns

In light of the developments in Syria and the increased processing capacity at border crossings, UNHCR continued to enhance its monitoring of voluntary returns across 13 provinces, at four border crossing points, and at Istanbul Airport. In February, UNHCR participated in a meeting with PMM to elaborate on the steps for conducting a joint “Syrian Return Intention Survey”.

Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

UNHCR continues to expedite resettlement processing for the most vulnerable refugees, many of whom are severely impacted by the suspension of the [US refugee admissions program](#). In February 2025, a total of 344 resettlement submissions were made (a total of 538 in 2025). In February, 244 refugees departed to third countries (a total of 964 refugees in 2025).

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has launched the [Japan Initiative for the Future of Syrian Refugees](#) (JISR) in Türkiye. This program offers opportunities for young Syrian refugees to study in graduate courses for their master's degrees at Japanese universities. UNHCR pre-identified approximately 45 students and sent messages to refugees to encourage them to apply for the program.

Education

Through the German Albert Einstein Refugee Academic Initiative (DAFI) programme, UNHCR has been offering scholarships to refugee students worldwide. The DAFI programme was launched in Türkiye in 2014 and is implemented in partnership with the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). The DAFI scholarship covers academic tuition fees, accommodation, textbooks, and living expenses in the country of asylum. Scholarships are granted for undergraduate programmes (two to four years), with the award renewed annually based on satisfactory academic performance. In addition to DAFI scholarships, UNHCR also provides cash grants to help refugee students partially cover their higher education costs. So far in 2025, a total of 138 students have received support through DAFI. UNHCR is currently identifying the students to be supported under the Higher Education Grant who will start receiving support in April.

Livelihoods

On 26 February, UNHCR's NGO partner ASAM organised a workshop titled 'Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market with a Focus on Durable Solutions'. UNHCR presented its development engagement aimed at the socio-economic inclusion of refugees through education and livelihoods.

To strengthen the capacity of the **Turkish Employment Agency** (İŞKUR) in providing service for refugees, 10 interpreters supported by UNHCR continued their service in Istanbul, Izmir, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Bursa, Kocaeli, Konya and Hatay. The interpreters support 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.

Inter-Agency Coordination

UNHCR co-leads the Regional Refugee and 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 5 March, the Inter-Agency coordination platform facilitated the second meeting of the Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG). Relevant focal points from 3RP partners participated in the meeting. The agenda covered recent updates on durable solutions, ensuring an inclusive approach that considers all available solutions rather than focusing solely on 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 2025 programmes. For more details: [UNHCR Türkiye Funding Update – 28 February 2025](#).