

# AEGEAN REGION

## Year 2021 in Review

**46,391**

**humanitarian relief items**

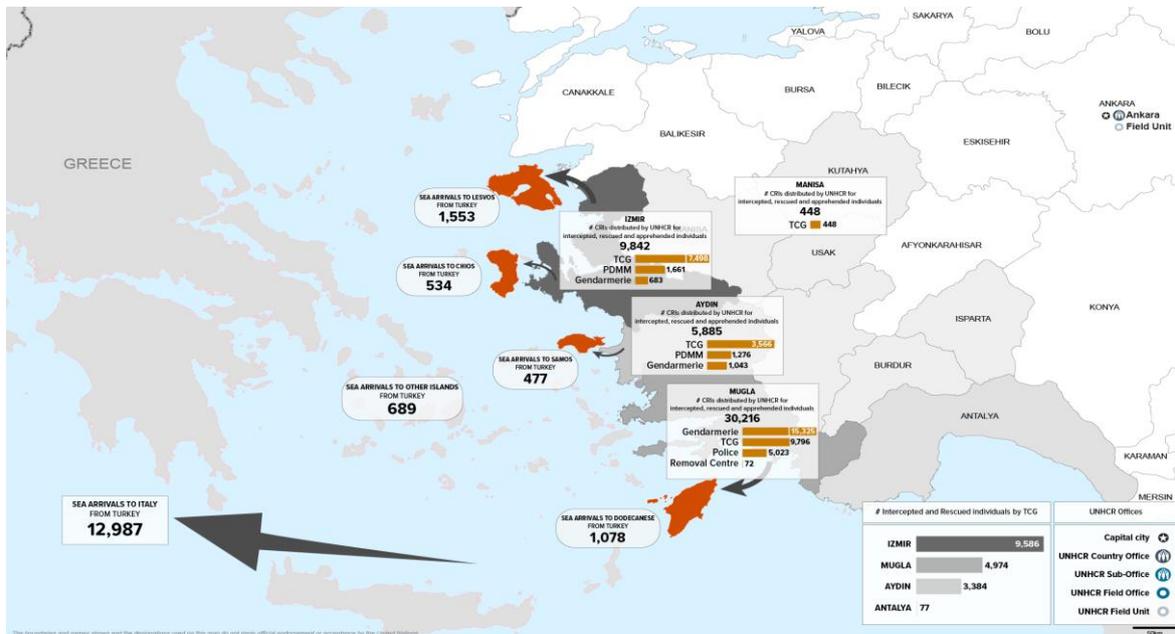
provided to support border authorities in responding to immediate humanitarian needs of persons rescued, intercepted and apprehended in the Aegean border region.

**4,350**

people were **assessed, counselled and referred** to relevant services through municipal and refugee-led partners in cooperation with UNHCR in the Aegean Region

**157**

**interviews with survivors of alleged pushbacks** by Hellenic Coast Guard conducted by UNHCR and the western border response team supported by UNHCR.



Overview of mixed migration movements towards Europe at the Aegean Sea borders, including interception and rescue figures by TCG, sea arrivals to Greece and Italy, and UNHCR support for intercepted, rescued and apprehended individuals.<sup>1</sup>

UNHCR Izmir Field Office promotes and supports access to and provision of protection and quality services for asylum-seekers and refugees in the Aegean region covering 10 provinces; namely, Izmir, Aydın, Muğla, Manisa, Denizli, Uşak, Kütahya, Isparta, Burdur and Antalya.

The western sea border of the Aegean region is of great importance with regards to **mixed migration movements** towards Europe, especially for those who aim to reach Greece as well as Italy. Italy has recently been an increasingly preferred alternative destination for persons on the move. In 2021, some 18,000 individuals were intercepted and rescued by the Turkish Coast Guards (TCG) along the Aegean Sea borders, reflecting an increase of 29 per cent compared to 2020. The highest number of interceptions and rescues in the Aegean region was recorded off the coast of Izmir (53%), followed by Muğla (28%), Aydın (19%) and Antalya (1%)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Sea Arrival information compiled from relevant data shared on UNHCR data portal by UNHCR offices in Greece and Italy. Apprehension figures are not included as there is no official data available to UNHCR.

<sup>2</sup> Percentages represent rounded values.

## ***Protection-sensitive border management and cooperation with border actors***

To meet the growing immediate needs of individuals who were intercepted, rescued and apprehended by the TCG, Gendarmerie and National Police, UNHCR delivered some 46,400 humanitarian relief items including water, food packs, blankets, hygiene kits and diapers. UNHCR also supported key border authorities in Izmir, Aydın and Muğla with personal protective equipment and hygiene items including 4,500 surgical masks and 60 litres of hand sanitizers to help improve the working conditions of law enforcement personnel as well as reception conditions during the initial processing of intercepted, apprehended and rescued individuals.

## ***Access to quality services of refugees with specific needs***

UNHCR conducted two ***regional online learning programmes for Psychologists and Social Workers*** to enhance the capacity of partners in the field to better respond to the specific needs of persons at risk. The trainings helped participants improve their knowledge and skills on working with LGBTI persons, people with trauma and survivors of gender based violence (GBV). In total, 30 psychologists from the Provincial Directorates of Family and Social Services in Isparta, Antalya, Izmir, Aydın and Manisa; as well as 25 social workers from the municipalities in Izmir, Manisa and Antalya attended the learning programmes.

As part of UNHCR's cooperation with Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, over 150 municipal staff received ***capacity development training*** on protection issues including international and temporary protection, refugee rights, obligations and services, and misinformation about refugees in Türkiye.

## ***Information and awareness-raising activities***

UNHCR carried out information sessions targeting refugees for the purpose of raising awareness and knowledge on GBV prevention, mitigation and response mechanisms in Türkiye as well as their rights and obligations.



*Information and awareness-raising session in Manisa @UNHCR*

In partnership with Yunusemre District Municipality and ASAM, UNHCR organized ***information and awareness-raising sessions*** for individuals under temporary and international protection in Manisa. Around 370 refugees participated in the training sessions and discussed coping mechanisms for GBV, social cohesion and rights and services.

Jointly with the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (KEDV), UNHCR conducted an ***information session*** on the prevention of GBV and rights and obligations. Some 19 Syrian women participated in the session which was conducted in Izmir.



*Information session for Syrian women held in Kültürpark, Izmir. @UNHCR*

## Communication with Communities

In its endeavour to enhance accountability to affected populations (AAP), UNHCR conducted a series of participatory assessments with persons of concern from diverse ages, genders and backgrounds at the field level. These included:

*Focus group discussions* (FGD) and *semi-structured interviews* (SSI) with 62 refugees in Izmir, Manisa, Uşak, Kütahya, Denizli and Antalya. The FGDs allowed UNHCR to obtain an overview of protection concerns, needs and underlying causes specific to individuals and groups at risk in access to information, rights and services.

*Feedback sessions* and an *online survey* were carried out with 58 Arabic and Farsi speaking beneficiaries of the Harmonization Centre which was established by Yunusemre District Municipality in Manisa with the support of UNHCR. Participants shared their feedback on content and quality of the service provided by the centre.

In cooperation with Yunusemre District Municipality and Manisa PDMM, UNHCR organized an *information sharing and consultation meeting* in Manisa. The meeting brought together 216 refugees and 11 service providers including Şehzadeler and Yunusemre District Municipalities, provincial directorates of migration management, health and national education, the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR), Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation and Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM). The meeting was held to inform refugees about rights, obligations and services as well as to hear their feedback, suggestions and challenges. During the meeting, refugees conveyed their questions to the representatives of local authorities regarding inclusion in available services, registration practices and resettlement processes.

## Engaging at the local level

In 2021, UNHCR broadened its networks and collaborations in the field by cooperating with five key municipalities and two city councils in the Aegean Region to promote social cohesion, raise awareness on refugee rights and obligations, and enhance inclusive service provision for refugees. Furthermore, UNHCR cooperated with the Afghan Solidarity Association (ASA) which is a community-led organization established in June 2020 in Uşak.

UNHCR's collaboration with **ASA** mainly focused on the identification and referral of persons with specific needs as well as supporting community self-management by disseminating informative materials and strengthening community engagement through Turkish language courses. In 2021, the association identified over 170 persons with specific needs and referred them to relevant services.

With the support of UNHCR, the Citizenship Communication Centre (HIM) of *Izmir Metropolitan Municipality* (IMM) was developed into a multi-lingual centre which offers service in Arabic and English as well as Turkish. Since its launch in July 2021, around 180 refugees reached out to the multi-lingual HIM and were referred to relevant municipal units. The Refugee Desk which was established in 2020 under the Department of Urban Justice and Equality, enhances the Municipality's coordination efforts in terms of service provision and referrals of persons with specific needs,

responding to emergency situations and developing cooperation with other provincial and local actors.

Through the joint efforts of IMM and UNHCR, a multi-lingual **City Guide** in six languages (Turkish, Arabic, Farsi, French, Kurdish and English) and a **Guide for Municipal Staff** were developed and published on the Municipality website. The guides offer extensive information on life in Izmir including services provided by the Metropolitan Municipality, rights of foreigners including access to education, health, work permits and legal aid as well as organizations which provide support and assistance. The city guide serves foreigners living in Izmir including refugees and international migrants. Whereas the guide for municipal staff was developed as a reference document for municipal personnel who work with refugees.

In 2021, with the support of UNHCR, a Harmonization Centre was established under **Yunusemre District Municipality**. The centre works on promoting social cohesion and harmonization between refugee and host communities through Turkish language courses and speaking clubs, awareness-raising meetings on rights and social cohesion, sports activities, experience sharing and consultation meetings for young people, and membership to the Municipality's Youth Council.

The refugee support desk in Izmir's **Buca District Municipality** continued its efforts to enhance equal access to services, promote peaceful coexistence through protection, and support lifelong opportunities for refugees. In 2021, the refugee support desk in Buca provided counselling to over 3,250 refugees on access to available services.

In 2021, a refugee desk was established in **Şehzadeler District Municipality** in Manisa with the support of UNHCR. The refugee desk conducted outreach visits to identify persons with specific needs and to promote the inclusion of refugees in available services in Şehzadeler. Within the year, over 1,100 individuals were reached through home visits.



*Syrian children posing with their cameras at the exhibition hall where photographs taken by them were displayed.*  
@UNHCR

UNHCR cooperated with the **Izmir City Council** on a social cohesion project called 'Muhit'. The project served to raise awareness amongst the local community on forced displacement through photographs, contributing to a more positive public attitude and perception towards refugees. Following a photo-shooting training by a qualified photographer, 24 Syrian children living in four different districts of Izmir took photos of their surroundings, houses, streets and neighborhoods depicting how they relate to the city they live in. The 72 photographs taken by the children were displayed in an exhibition inaugurated by Izmir City Council, Izmir Municipal Council and UNHCR.



Representatives from Denizli Metropolitan Municipality, Denizli City Council and UNHCR inaugurating the Denizli Youth Academy @Denizli City Council

In 2021, the “Denizli Youth Academy” was established through joint efforts of UNHCR, *Denizli Metropolitan Municipality and Denizli City Council*. The youth academy offers young people, of both host and refugee communities, opportunities for self-development while contributing to society collectively through the city council’s activities, including socio-cultural activities, skills building, and youth empowerment and peer mentorship.

Furthermore, as a response to the emerging needs in the field, UNHCR delivered **over 16,000 relief items** (hygiene kits, water, food packages and clothing) and **31,000 masks** to vulnerable refugee and local community members through local authorities and UNHCR partners in Izmir, Manisa and Muğla.

## *Working towards durable solutions*

### Education

Yunusemre District Municipality and UNHCR teamed up to conduct *online guidance meetings on access to higher education*. Participants included 71 students preparing for the foreign student exam as well as university students from Denizli, Kütahya, Uşak and Manisa. The meetings allowed participants to exchange information relevant to preparing for the foreign student exam, scholarship programs, the university enrolment process, and career opportunities for foreign students.

In collaboration with ASA and the refugee desks in Yunusemre and Buca District Municipalities, over 170 individuals under temporary or international protection were enrolled in *Turkish language courses* in Izmir, Manisa and Uşak. Almost 70 per cent of the beneficiaries were women.

Further to the language courses, and as part of UNHCR’s partnership with Yunusemre District Municipality *Turkish speaking clubs* were organized in Manisa. Over 40 individuals participated in the speaking clubs thus having the opportunity to practice and develop their Turkish language skills.

### Self-reliance and livelihoods support

UNHCR organized the first *“Discussion Platform for Social Entrepreneurs and Cooperatives in the Aegean Region”* in cooperation with the World Bank and in consultation with the Ministry of Trade. Around 80 representatives of 40 institutions, including cooperatives, municipalities, development agencies, international financial institutions, academia and NGOs in the Aegean region took part in the meeting. Discussions contributed to the identification of needs and challenges in the field with regards to self-reliance and socio-economic inclusion of people in need of international protection and developing an action plan to promote sustainable income generation for refugees through social enterprises and cooperatives.

## Monitoring the voluntary nature of self-organized returns

In 2021, UNHCR observed the voluntary return interviews of 118 families (238 individuals) conducted at PDMs in Izmir and Manisa. The key findings of the monitoring reflected that the most preferred destination of return in Syria was Aleppo followed by Manbij. The main reason of return was identified as reuniting with family members.

### 238 Individuals

Observed by UNHCR for voluntary returns in 2021 in Izmir and Manisa.



## Enhancing partnerships and coordination

UNHCR's coordination efforts to support the refugee response in the field remained crucial to avoid duplication and gaps in international assistance. Considering the protracted COVID-19 situation and deteriorating conditions for refugees, in addition to inter-sector coordination platform, dedicated working groups were established for child protection and gender-based violence as well as protection and basic needs sectors for an in-depth elaboration of specific needs and to coordinate an appropriate response with partners in the region.



*Refugee children practicing photography techniques learnt at the photography training through joint efforts of Izmir City Council and UNHCR. @ Izmir City Council*

Thanks to donors **for their support to UNHCR Türkiye** in 2021

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### LINKS

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