

Strengthening protection and access to quality services of refugees with specific needs

CONTEXT AND PRIORITIES

Turkey's legal framework provides temporary protection beneficiaries and international protection applicants, upon their registration with the authorities, access to a broad range of services (education, health, social services) and access to employment, subject to a work-permit. UNHCR works on strengthening protection and access to public services for all refugees, in particular those with specific needs, by working closely with national, provincial, local and international partners. Efforts focus on persons with legal and physical protection needs, women and girls at risk, persons with serious medical needs (including disabilities or chronic illnesses), survivors of violence and torture and children and adolescents at risk. Particular attention is placed on identifying persons with these specific needs and profiles, with a view to responding to their needs, including by referring them to relevant service providers. Co-operation with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS), the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), civil society actors and community support networks in the identification, referral and response to refugees with specific needs form the backbone of the strategic approach.

Working with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services

With the aim of increasing effective access to public services for persons with specific needs, UNHCR has established a close working relationship with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MOFLSS) which a Protocol of Cooperation which was signed in January 2018 and extended in 2019. The Ministry is responsible for family affairs and social services (including but not limited to women's shelters, accommodation for unaccompanied children, and community and social service centres) and as such for the provision of protection and assistance to vulnerable persons. MoFLSS is an important actor in the refugee response and key in pursuing the policy of inclusion of refugees in national social protection and assistance schemes. In this regard, closely collaborating with and supporting this institution is a critical aspect of UNHCR's protection strategy in Turkey and that of the Refugee and Resilience Response Plan (3RP). The Ministry and UNHCR have a long history of working together. UNHCR has been working closely with MOFLSS and institutions preceding its establishment to enhance child protection and prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). More recently, the focus of the collaboration has been on Social Service Centres (SSCs).

Social Service Centres

Social Service Centres (SSCs) are a relatively new social service provision model developed by the Ministry to identify persons and families at risk and to address their needs. SSCs provide a number of services, such as counselling, socio-economic support to vulnerable families with children and youth, home care allowance to disabled and elderly persons, psychological support, and referral of persons in need to other relevant state services and schemes.

UNHCR supports the SSCs to target and respond to the needs of highly vulnerable and at-risk refugees by providing them with staff (such as social workers, psychologists, interpreters, drivers and administrative staff), and helping enhance their physical capacity (with vehicles, furniture and office equipment) as well as technical capacity (through trainings on international protection, engaging with communities and psychosocial support in a refugee context, and on working with special needs groups). UNHCR coordinates its support to SSCs within a Task Force established under the 3RP coordination framework, with UNFPA and UNICEF.



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Social service centres supported in **33 cities**

Working with the Directorate General of Migration Management

Persons under temporary protection as well as international protection applicants are granted access to services upon their registration with the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). With the aim of increasing effective access to public services for persons with specific needs, UNHCR works closely with DGMM with regards to identification, recording and referral of persons with specific needs throughout the registration process, including through protection desks, established at DGMM's provincial directorates.

Protection Desks

Protection desks, staffed with trained personnel who speak Arabic, Dari, Pashto, Farsi and Somali, are used as a platform to conduct detailed protection assessments and subsequently refer individuals identified with specific needs to relevant public institutions for further assistance. Protection desks were introduced through the recently completed verification exercise that aimed at updating the registration records of 2.7 million Syrians under temporary protection. The added value of protection desks was identified as a positive practice during the verification; they were subsequently included in DGMM and Provincial Directorates of Migration Management standard operating procedures. Since January 2019, UNHCR has been supporting DGMM with a target to establishing 57 protection desks in 50 provinces with over 100 additional staff.



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Protection desks supported in **47 provinces** with **95 staff**

Working with Civil Society Actors

In addition to working closely with the MoFLSS and DGMM, UNHCR works with civil society actors to identify, respond to and refer refugees with specific needs to public services. This is done through multiple stakeholders, including but not limited to eight protection partners with whom project partnership agreements have been signed in 2019, local women's associations, community-led organizations, LGBTI networks, youth and volunteer networks, and other local actors such as mukhtars and imams.

Identification

UNHCR and its partners identify persons with specific needs through community centres, satellite offices, field visits, focus group discussions, and other outreach activities, using comprehensive protection assessment tools. Based on the information collected, the cases are identified with low, medium, and high risk categories. The high risk category is associated with cases that need immediate action and follow up.

Referral

The cases identified with protection needs are referred to relevant service providers, in particular, relevant governmental and municipal institutions. Depending on the case and its urgency, before referring it, UNHCR and its partners may contact the competent government institution, to flag a case, obtain information and seek further advice. Upon referral, and in complex cases where the problem requires a series of actions, UNHCR may need to be in frequent contact with the respective institution in order to provide additional information, intervene, if necessary, and explain the procedure to the refugee concerned.

Assistance

Assistance is provided to persons with specific needs depending on the need and risk identified. This assistance can thus take a multiplicity of shapes and range from protection counselling to cash assistance.

- Refugees in need of information are provided with protection counselling through phone counselling, field offices, and protection outreach missions.
- In order to complement public services with direct specialized mental health assistance, psychosocial activities are also conducted. These are tailored to the needs of the communities following a participatory approach. Psychosocial group sessions include psychodrama, well-being workshops, recreational activities, and experience sharing through support groups. The main goal is to promote healthy coping mechanisms, as well as empowerment of persons with specific needs. Psychosocial assistance is provided through UNHCR's protection partners.
- Cash or other direct assistance (such as for transportation costs, translation costs, and cost of medical examination), either as a one-off or more regularly, may also be provided. This assistance serves as a safety net for the most vulnerable who may not yet be identified or considered eligible for assistance by the state authorities.



UNHCR staff speaks to a family at Kahramanmaraş temporary accommodation centre. © UNHCR/Emrah Gürel

UNHCR's cash for protection assistance

In 2018, UNHCR started piloting cash for protection interventions targeting refugees and asylum seekers with specific protection needs such as SGBV survivors, unaccompanied adolescents aging out of orphanages, and transgender and intersex persons, to support them to meet their specific needs and to prevent negative coping mechanisms. More than 900 persons have been assisted to date, and have received cash payments over USD 6.5 million. Given the impact of the interventions, UNHCR intends to continue the programme.

Cash transfers are also provided to persons with specific needs and protection concerns, whose situations are aggravated by dire living conditions and who have adopted detrimental coping mechanisms. The programme assists refugees from all nationalities except Syrians, not covered by other social schemes as a means to mitigate and respond to protection risks. More than 5,000 refugees were assisted since January 2018, and have received regular cash payments worth more than USD 24 million.

The beneficiaries of UNHCR's cash for protection interventions are identified and selected through a referral systems by partners and stakeholders, including government and municipal actors. They are then assessed for eligibility through UNHCR's protection tools, and eventually enter into a system of constant follow-up to monitor that the financial assistance is effective and contributes to protection outcomes.

Eligible refugees are provided with cash assistance through a prepaid card delivered by the Post and Telecommunications Bank (PTT).

Focus on the prevention and response to SGBV, on LGBTI and on unaccompanied or separated children

SGBV: UNHCR focuses on the prevention and response to SGBV in its work with the MoFLSS and with civil society. Preventive measures are implemented through community-based awareness-raising and information dissemination campaigns on early marriage, forced marriage and domestic violence. Mitigation and response measures are implemented through UNHCR's collaboration with local women's associations and others working with LGBTI persons and survivors of SGBV to improve outreach and identification. Lastly, UNHCR supports survivors and individuals at heightened risk of SGBV with cash for protection, through legal counselling and advice, and referrals to relevant services.

LGBTI: UNHCR and its specialized partners, many of whom have been trained on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the past years, implement awareness-raising and training sessions. These target both LGBTI community members across Turkey, but also DGMM and its provincial directorates' deployed security guards and other staff. UNHCR actively prioritizes at risk cases for comprehensive solution opportunities, including resettlement and cash for protection.

Unaccompanied or separated children: UNHCR works closely with the MoFLSS and DGMM, as well as community structures, to develop efficient referral mechanisms to allow for the prompt registration and accommodation of unaccompanied children. While continuing to conduct best interests procedures, both assessments (BIA) and determinations (BID), UNHCR works to further strengthen its collaboration with the authorities in this area. In 2018, some 178 UNHCR and partner staff members from Ankara, Izmir and South East Turkey benefited from trainings on BID Guidelines; while in 2019, by the end of July, 76 UNHCR and partner staff members from Ankara and the South East benefitted from trainings on BID guidelines.

Supporting refugee initiatives

With over 98 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey residing outside of temporary accommodation centres, outreach and engagement with communities for protection continues to be a key strategic priority. Complementing the efforts of the authorities, UNHCR works with refugee communities and supports them to identify and build upon their resources and resilience mechanisms. UNHCR thus works to strengthen community-based support networks and their capacity to identify, prevent and where possible, support refugees with specific needs.

Refugee participation and representation

UNHCR supports refugee community structures in Temporary Accommodation Centres and works with municipalities to advocate that concerns and ideas of refugees are considered in decision-making structures. Such structures and fora allow refugee communities to come together and provide peer support, identify challenges and possible solutions, and bring these to the attention of the authorities, UNHCR, or other partners. In line with its community-based protection strategy, UNHCR facilitates the inclusion of refugee representatives in city councils, by working closely with municipalities where UNHCR and others have supported the establishment of social protection desks, refugee council centres or community centres to improve access to information and refer refugees to relevant services.



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Social protection desks
established in 10
municipalities of **Istanbul**

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LINKS

[Regional Portal - Syria Regional Refugee Response](#) | [Regional Portal - Mediterranean](#) | [UNHCR Turkey website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Services Advisor](#) | [UNHCR Help](#)