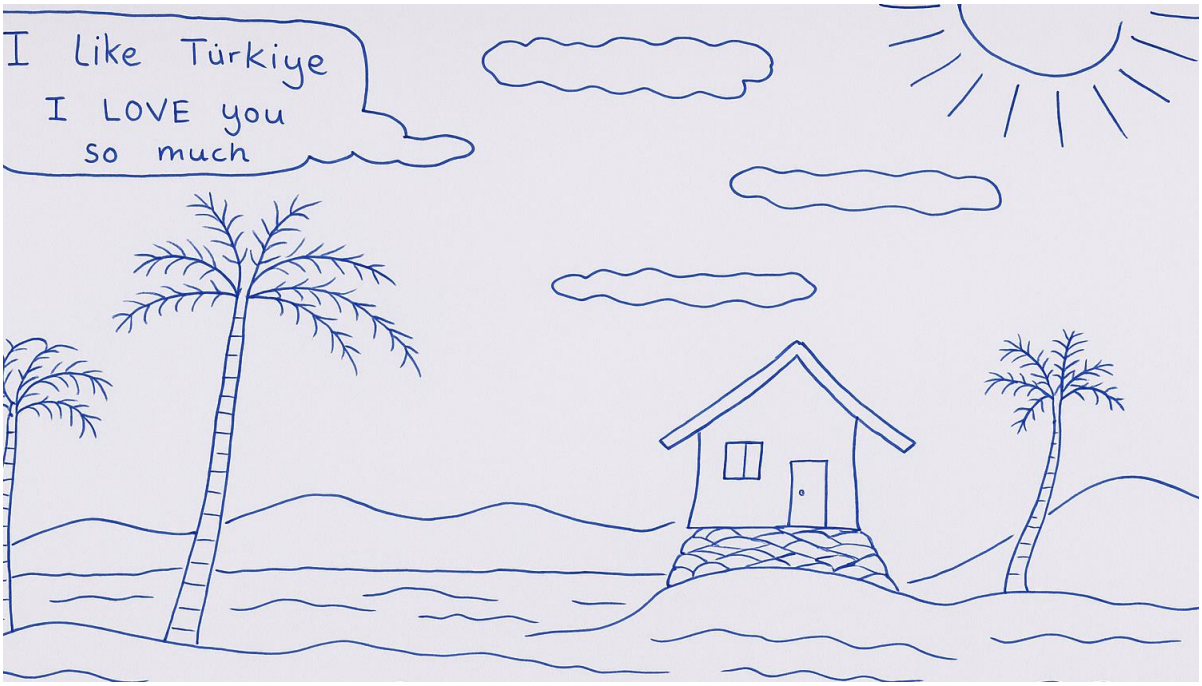
Refugees Cherish Memories of Türkiye while Returning Home

A substantial number of returns from Türkiye to Syria have been recorded since December 2024. To ensure the voluntary nature of their decisions, UNHCR has interviewed the majority of those who have returned.



During voluntary return interviews in Ankara, a 10-year-old Syrian girl born and raised in Türkiye shared this drawing with UNHCR. She speaks Arabic and Turkish fluently, has never seen Syria, and wrote this message all by herself: "I like Türkiye. I love you so much."

Highlights

- As of 8 May 2025, UNHCR estimates that approximately 481,730 Syrians have returned to Syria via neighbouring countries since 8 December 2024, including some 200,000 Syrians who have voluntarily returned from Türkiye (as of 28 April).
- According to the registration figures from the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) as of 8 May, 2,744,686 Syrians live in Türkiye under Temporary Protection. Additionally, over 193,340 refugees and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Ukraine, and other countries of origin are residing under international protection in Türkiye (as of December 2024).
- On 28 April, UNHCR Representative Ms. Angela Li Rosi attended the “Türkiye’s Migration Management Model in the Century of Türkiye” in Istanbul. During the conference, President Erdoğan provided an overview of Türkiye’s migration management policies, efforts, and figures. The former President of PMM, Mr. Atilla Toros, who delivered a keynote speech, and the current President, Mr. Hüseyin Kök, at the panel session emphasised UNHCR's role in the voluntary return process, recognising the cooperation and support. Minister Ali Yerlikaya detailed Türkiye’s coordinated efforts to address labour shortages, including residence and work permits for foreign shepherds, while enhancing systems to combat irregular migration and informal employment. He also reaffirmed Türkiye’s commitment to safe and dignified voluntary returns to Syria.

Recent Developments

National

On 6 May, during her mission to Konya (Central Anatolia), UNHCR Representative Ms. Angela Li Rosi met with Mr. İbrahim Akın, the Governor of Konya, accompanied by the Provincial Directors of Migration Management (PDMM), and Family and Social Services (PDoFSS). She also joined the provincial Inter-Agency coordination meeting and a focus group discussion with refugees who had returned from go-and-see visits to Syria. Konya hosts over 114,000 Syrian refugees under temporary protection and around 15,000 refugees from various countries under international protection. UNHCR supports the Konya PDMM by providing Arabic and Farsi-speaking interviewers, interpreters, and social workers for the protection desk.



During the meeting, Mr. İbrahim Akin, Governor of Konya presented a souvenir to Ms. Angela Li Rosi UNHCR Representative.

Regional

On 29 April, the 4th Italy–Türkiye Intergovernmental Summit, co-chaired by President Erdoğan and Italian Prime Minister Meloni, resulted in a Joint Declaration emphasising strengthened cooperation on migration, counter-terrorism, and judicial matters. The parties reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the Türkiye-EU Visa Liberalisation Dialogue and modernising the Customs Union. They agreed to enhance coordination on irregular migration and support for voluntary returns of Syrians while promoting inclusive cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. They underscored the importance of working with UN agencies such as UNHCR and IOM and called on the international community to increase its engagement in Syria. Two memoranda of understanding were also signed to boost collaboration in the field of social services between relevant ministries.

On 15 April, UNHCR operations in countries that are hosting Syrian refugees organized a donor briefing on the 2025 Regional Strategic Overview of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), to enhance collective understanding of return dynamics, preparedness needs, civil society engagement, and the strategic outlook of the 3RP as a critical coordination platform linking humanitarian, development, and peace efforts across the region. Over 230 participants from donors, international organisations, civil society, and financial institutions attended the briefing.

Global

On 6 May, Mr. Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, convened a briefing for Member States in Geneva on the ongoing review process at UNHCR initiated to adapt to the funding crisis - resulting in a 30 per cent global reduction in spending, with field operations most affected by virtue of UNHCR's structure. The High Commissioner informed participants that the senior leadership positions have been reduced by 50 per cent. Regional offices are being streamlined, with the Southern Africa Bureau closing, operations in 18 countries being closed, and a further 10 Offices being nationalized. The overall workforce will be reduced by one-third. The High Commissioner affirmed that despite these cuts, commitments to inclusion, gender, and geographic diversity remain, with focused efforts to localize the workforce.

On 13 May 2025, President Donald Trump announced the lifting of all U.S. sanctions on Syria. Several international leaders – including those from Europe and the region – welcomed such a decision, signalling a broader diplomatic rapprochement and paving the way for the normalization of relations with Syria. Since the 8th of December 2024, UNHCR has advocated for the lifting of sanctions to improve access to essential services and support for vulnerable populations across the country.

Protection Assistance & Advocacy

Protection, Communications with Communities and Access to Services

During April, UNHCR Türkiye's Counselling Line answered 19,316 calls from 76 provinces. Most of the callers with specific needs who reached the counselling line are Syrian nationals. Resettlement queries were the priority for Syrian, Afghan, Iranian, and Iraqi nationals.

UNHCR counselled and intervened in 1,130 cases involving administrative detention and negative government decisions on asylum applications in April. Of these, 395 were related to queries and counselling regarding administrative detention and access to the national asylum procedure in Türkiye, and 558 were cases that received negative government decisions (486 rejection of asylum claims, 72 deportation orders). It also includes 177 implicit withdrawals of asylum applications/ termination of assessments due to non-compliance with the regulations.

In April, UNHCR continued providing in-kind assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, including medical support through the contracted clinic for 57 individuals and the contracted pharmacy for 52 individuals. In addition, 717 individuals received assistance with transportation related to protection needs.

Access to Territory and Asylum Procedures

From 5 to 7 May, as part of the partnership with PMM, UNHCR organized a workshop in Ankara focusing on the international protection procedures of Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs). A total of 77 participants attended the workshop, including 13 from PMM, such as the Head of Status Determination, and 64 PDMM staff. The workshop aimed to inform PDMMs about standard practices and recent developments. UNHCR presented challenges and practices observed in registration and documentation for IP applicants and status holders, as well as the key findings of the participatory assessment activities in 2024.

On 25 April, a training session was organized for 32 PDMM and PMM interpreters. PMM and UNHCR facilitated the training, which focused on legal terminologies, the use of interpretation in asylum procedures and the role of interpreters, as well as how interpreters can support a child-friendly interview environment with professional and ethical standards.

Two workshops on cases originating from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan were organized in Ankara between 14 April and 17 April, with the participation of total 76 PMM and PDMM staff. Six international experts from the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), Swedish Migration Agency (SMA), German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), and Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) made presentations on the overview of the Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan caseloads and the current risk profiles in each country of asylum, well-founded fear of persecution, convention grounds, etc.

From 8 to 10 April 2025, UNHCR supported PMM staff with a study visit to the Netherlands. The visit with 10 PMM officials aimed to enhance PMM's knowledge of different country practices and explore policies regarding various stages of asylum procedures. The study visit included a briefing by the Netherlands Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Central Agency for the Reception, along with visits to the Ter Apel Registration Centre, Royal Military Police, Process Reception Centre, Dutch Refugee Council, and Legal Aid Board.

In April 2025, UNHCR and partners delivered 3,687 core relief items, including baby food, water, hygiene products, and clothing for over 1,000 individuals through the border authorities and Gendarmerie (law enforcement force under the Ministry of Interior) in İzmir, Balıkesir, Muğla, Edirne and Kırklareli to address the basic needs of individuals who were rescued.

Legal Aid and Legal Assistance

UNHCR, in partnership with the Union of the Turkish Bar Associations (UTBA), continued its support to 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 March, these six LCs provided legal assistance to 613 refugees and asylum-seekers (including 109 individuals in removal centres and temporary accommodation centre) for 990 cases.

Support for Solutions

Voluntary Returns

In May, UNHCR began monitoring the voluntary returns of Syrians in Osmaniye, Nevşehir and Niğde. Currently, UNHCR monitors returns at 20 PDMM offices in 18 provinces, four border crossings in the southeast, and Istanbul Airport. UNHCR is also ready for monitoring at Sabiha Gökçen Airport in İstanbul and Ankara Esenboğa Airport when the announced flights start – currently cancelled for the month of May (Learn more).

UNHCR, with support from two refugee-led organisations (RLOs), i.e. Olive Branch and Basmeh & Zeitooneh, conducted focus group discussions with 31 Syrian refugees who recently returned from Syria through the go-and-see visits. Key findings suggest that refugees valued the opportunity to visit Syria, assess the situation, reconnect with their homeland, and reunite with family and friends. These visits held deep emotional significance and offered an opportunity to observe the security situation, services, and employment opportunities for an eventual decision.

On 9 May 2025, UNHCR welcomed a Nordic delegation to Hatay in southeast Türkiye, comprised of H.E. Ole Toft, Ambassador of Denmark, H.E. Anna Malena Mard, Ambassador of Sweden, H.E. Andreas Gaarder, Ambassador of Norway, and H.E. Pirkko Mirjami Hamalainen, Ambassador of Finland. The visit provided a platform for refugees to share their experiences following the February 2023 earthquake in Hatay, their views on returning to Syria, and the support needed for a viable return. The delegation emphasized the importance of sustained collaboration to address the ongoing challenges and ensure support for refugees.



Ambassadors of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland in a focus group discussion with Syrian refugees under temporary protection in Hatay.

Education

In April, UNHCR paid monthly assistance for 130 students and tuition fee support for 127 students, within the scope of the higher education DAFI scholarship programme. In addition, UNHCR paid tuition fee support for 699 students under the cash grant for the higher-education programme.

Livelihoods

In the first quarter of 2025, UNHCR supported the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) by providing 10 interpreters in Istanbul, Izmir, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Bursa, Kocaeli, Konya, and Hatay. They assisted in facilitating referrals, counselling, and job placement services for refugees. By the end of March 2025, a total of 6,373 refugees under International Protection (IP) and Temporary Protection had registered in the İŞKUR database for employment-related services. Among them, 1,539 participated in on-the-job training programs.

Social Cohesion:

In April, a mission from the IFC–UNHCR Joint Initiative took place in conjunction with an EU Delegation workshop on “Access to Finance by Refugee and Host Populations in Türkiye”. UNHCR and the Joint Initiative agreed to address refugee and vulnerable groups' financial inclusion issues more comprehensively, including access to bank accounts and mobile phones.

On 30 April, UNHCR held a consultation with seven refugee-led RLOs in Istanbul where the participants shared their challenges and sought UNHCR’s support to raise awareness among refugees about various rules and regulations concerning identity documentation. Earlier, on 28 and 29 April, two similar workshops were organized with the online participation of 6 RLOs.

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 – 31 March 2025.