The UN High Commissioner for Refugees affirms continued cooperation with Türkiye to protect refugees and support them in finding solutions.

Within the first month of taking office as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Barham Salih visited Türkiye, underscoring his commitment to the country that has been hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations for over a decade.



Various engagements of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Barham Salih, during his visit to Türkiye.

Highlights

- Over **600,000 Syrians voluntarily returned** from Türkiye to Syria since 8 December 2024. During this same period, UNHCR interviewed close to 453,000 individuals, covering 75 per cent of all recorded returns.
- Mr. Barham Salih, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, conducted an official visit to Türkiye from 28 to 31 January 2026, reaffirming the strong and longstanding partnership between UNHCR and the Government of Türkiye in responding to the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers. Interactions with refugees from Syria, as well as representatives of refugee-led organizations focusing on Afghan refugees, were central to the visit. These interactions offered the High Commissioner an opportunity to hear stories of resilience and hope, and reinforced UNHCR's people-centred approach.

  The High Commissioner held high-level discussions with H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Ali Yerlikaya, Minister of Interior; and Mr. Numan Kurtulmuş, Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly; focusing on international protection, international responsibility-sharing, and sustained support for Türkiye's refugee response. The High Commissioner also engaged with the UN Resident Coordinator, the UN Country Team, ambassadors, and representatives of the international community to discuss coordination and solutions in an increasingly complex regional context. Meetings with UNHCR Türkiye staff provided an opportunity to recognize their dedication and efforts. The mission concluded with a meeting with the Governor of Kilis and visit to the voluntary return processing area in Öncüpınar - Bab al Salam border crossing in southern Türkiye (bordering Syria), alongside the President of Migration Management.

Recent Developments

According to media reports, Syria has officially started recognizing the diplomas of students who graduated from Turkish universities, following coordination between the relevant authorities. The process was concluded positively, and a dedicated commission has been established under Syria's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to validate academic qualifications and regularize graduates' status. This progress will facilitate re-integration of Syrian youths upon their voluntary return from Türkiye to Syria.

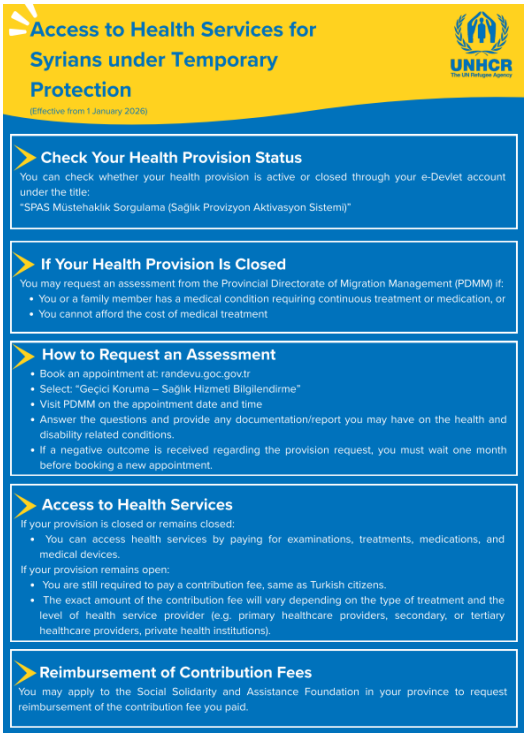
On 16 January, the Turkish Presidency's Head of Communications announced that President Erdoğan was invited by US President Donald Trump to serve as a founding member of the United Nations Board of Peace, to be established to oversee security and reconstruction efforts in Gaza. The invitation was extended by President Trump in his capacity as the founding head of the Board.

Protection-Assistance & Advocacy

Protection and Access to Services

In January, UNHCR continued providing protection services through counselling, case management, and targeted referrals for refugees and asylum-seekers facing heightened vulnerabilities.

Through various channels of communicating with communities, including the HELP page and Social Media accounts, UNHCR circulated information to clarify procedures under amended health regulations for refugees. In 2025, UNHCR supported 178,000 refugees with various protection services.



UNHCR Türkiye's WhatsApp Bot, developed to improve access to UNHCR information, remains live and publicly accessible via WhatsApp on both mobile devices and laptops. The tool is designed to be user-friendly, particularly for individuals with limited digital literacy. In light of recent changes in services, partners, and resources, relevant functional units will review, update, and refresh the content as needed. In the meantime, the platform continues to be available for public use.

In January, UNHCR Türkiye Counselling Line responded to 18,852 (44 per cent of the received calls were from Afghan nationals, followed by Syrians (36 per cent), Iranians (12 per cent), and Iraqis (4 per cent) from 73 provinces. The main line of inquiry include resettlement and legal assistance.

As UNHCR had to suspend new referrals for medical services, as well as medication and transportation support since the beginning of 2026, only follow-up clinic appointments scheduled for January were processed this month. In January 2026, a total of 243 services were provided for individuals with health-related needs. A total of 140 follow-up appointments were arranged for 97 individuals at the contracted clinic. Of 97 individuals, 75 were Afghan nationals, and 20 were Iranian nationals. All referrals concerned individuals with inactive health insurance. Medication and transportation support were provided exclusively to individuals attending these follow-up appointments. Accordingly, 89 transportation support for these follow-up appointments and medication support for 57 prescriptions were provided.

Child protection activities in January focused on identification, and response for children at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children. On 29-30 January, UNHCR contributed to strengthening capacity of partners by co-facilitating UNICEF-led training on the *Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse Guidelines*, reinforcing best-interest, survivor-centred, and rights-based approaches across child protection actors. In 2025, UNHCR supported nearly 7,000 refugee children in dire need.



UNHCR maintains regular communication with vulnerable refugee families and assesses their protection needs.

Access to Asylum Procedures

In January, UNHCR continued working side by side with the Turkish authorities to make the country's asylum system more accessible to refugees and asylum seekers. Regular coordination meetings with departments of the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) helped ensure procedural consistency across different locations.

UNHCR and its counterparts jointly reviewed the available information collected through interviews with refugees to better understand their overall situation and identify people with specific needs. This collaborative analysis helped ensure that the vulnerable families could be identified and supported in a timely manner.

In addition, the Office continued to compile and translate information on the country-of-origin of the asylum applicants to support fair and well-informed decision-making in asylum procedures.

Support for Solutions

Voluntary Returns



Syrians returning to Syria through the Hatay Cilvegozu bordar gate.

Since 8 December 2024, UNHCR has monitored the voluntary repatriation of over 453,000 Syrians. Currently, UNHCR monitors returns at 25 Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) offices, in 22 provinces and at six border crossings in the south-east. UNHCR is also present at İstanbul and Sabiha Gökçen Airports in İstanbul and at Esenboğa Airport in Ankara.

Most interviews were conducted in certain border and metropolitan provinces, which were also among the key places of residence for returnees prior to departure. A small number of refugees were interviewed in temporary accommodation centres and at the airports. The main reasons for return have remained unchanged over time, with political developments, improved security, and family reunification or the need to attend family events being the most frequently mentioned. Other reasons include nostalgia or homesickness, wish to reclaim property and the need to work.

The majority of returnees were heading to provinces in northern Syria, with Aleppo, Idleb, Damascus, and Hama among the most common destinations. Regarding accommodation, some returnees owned their homes or had property belonging to close relatives. While many reported that their houses were in good condition, others indicated partial damage or destruction. A significant portion confirmed they had valid documentation proving ownership.

A small portion of returnees lacked any Syrian-issued papers. Among those who did have documents, national identity cards, family booklets, and passports were the most common. Births and deaths in Türkiye were generally well-documented, but documentation rates for marriages

and divorces were lower. The demographic profile reflects a balanced gender distribution, with a significant share of children.

Resettlement and complementary pathways:

In January 2026, a total of, **379** resettlement submissions (43 Syrians, 52 Iranian and 281 Afghan) were made, mainly to Australia, Canada, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, and **80** refugees (47 Afghans, 32 Syrians and 1 Iranian) departed on resettlement to Australia, Canada, Finland and Ireland. In 2025, 3,766 of the most vulnerable refugees were resettled from Türkiye to 14 countries, including (but not limited to) Australia, Canada, France, and the Netherlands.

Education, Livelihoods, and Economic Inclusion

In January, upon the completion and confirmation of the documentation process for students supported by the DAFI scholarship, UNHCR finalized the payments of the refugee students of nationalities other than Syrians (a separate DAFI programme covers Syrian refugee students). Consequently, 108 students will be supported with monthly scholarships to pursue their higher education in various disciplines, including Civil, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Nursing, Psychology, and International Relations. More than half of the beneficiaries are female students.



A refugee student from Syria supported by UNHCR in Türkiye

UNHCR also organized two orientation meetings for newly selected DAFI scholarship students and provided detailed information on the DAFI Programme's rules, procedures, eligibility criteria, and implementation modalities, as well as clear guidance on how students can reach out for assistance through support channels. In 2025, UNHCR supported 2,972 students through DAFI scholarships (713) and higher education cash grants (2,259).

External Relations

On 15 December, UNHCR Türkiye signed the second EU-funded project under the 2024 programming of the EU Facility for Refugees in Türkiye. This multi-year (36-month) project titled "Supporting Türkiye's International and Temporary Protection Processes" will aim to support enhancing Türkiye's international and temporary protection processes with improved access to protection and services.

Inter-Agency Coordination

On 28 January, UNHCR convened consultation with donors on the planning of 3RP 2026 Türkiye chapter. The meeting served to inform strategy development and capture their perspectives on priority needs in Türkiye. Discussions emphasized that the 3RP 2026 will focus on maintaining the protection space for the large refugee population estimated to remain in Türkiye, given that conditions in Syria do not yet allow for large-scale returns.

Funding Information

UNHCR is grateful for generous contributions from its donors, who have provided both earmarked and flexible funding to support its operations in Türkiye.

US$ 210 million
UNHCR requested for the operation in Türkiye for 2026.



