UNHCR facilitates UN Secretary-General António Guterres' engagement with refugee-led and civil society organizations in Türkiye

The meeting with refugee-led and civil society organizations provided the UN Secretary-General with insights and experiences from the field, as well as recommendations on the broader refugee response in Türkiye.



Mr. António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, Ms. Angela Li Rosi, UNHCR Representative in Türkiye, and Babatunde A. Ahonsi, UN Resident Coordinator in Türkiye, in a meeting with representatives from refugee-led and civil society organizations in Ankara on 12 March 2026.

Highlights



UN Secretary-General with the Representative and Deputy Representative of UNHCR in Türkiye.

On 12 March, UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited Türkiye. In addition to receiving the Atatürk International Peace Prize, the Secretary-General had separate meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. The Secretary-General participated in a meeting with representatives of refugee-led organizations and civil society partners, organized by UNHCR at his request. The discussion, moderated by the UNHCR Representative, provided a platform for direct exchange with organizations working with refugees and asylum-seekers across Türkiye under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) framework.



UN Secretary-General's visit to Ankara PDMM

The Secretary-General, accompanied by the UNHCR Representative, also visited the Ankara Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM), where he received briefings on Türkiye's migration management system, the temporary protection framework for Syrian refugees and their voluntary return processes, with UNHCR support and engagement highlighted. The visit to Türkiye was part of the Secretary General's Ramadan solidarity visit.

Recent Developments

Throughout March, UNHCR continued to observe the situation along the border in close coordination with authorities and partners, with the Kapıköy (Van), Gürbulak (Ağrı), and Esendere (Hakkari) border crossings remaining operational. Following the Eid and Nowruz periods, cross-border movements have begun to stabilize, with arrivals to Türkiye gradually decreasing and departures to Iran increasing. Documented movements remain largely routine and seasonal, driven primarily by tourism, business, and family visits, with most journeys pre-planned and border processing smooth and efficient.



UNHCR team at Iran-Türkiye border gate.

It was reported that an increasing number of Iranian nationals are returning to Iran within a week of entering Türkiye, underscoring the temporary nature of current mobility trends. Returns are primarily linked to family obligations and the completion of short visits, with the general intention to remain in Iran and no indications of a shift toward displacement yet.

National preparedness plans are being coordinated by the Ministry of Interior's Presidency of Migration Management, while UNHCR is leading and reinforcing coordination with UN agencies and partners in Ankara and the border regions to enhance preparedness and strengthen information management. Response capacities are being systematically mapped, and data coordination is being consolidated to ensure readiness for potential activation of the contingency plan, should Turkish authorities request support in the event of increased movement.

Despite several ballistic missiles entering Turkish airspace, the overall security situation in Türkiye remained stable, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) defence intercepted and neutralized the attacks. The authorities reaffirmed their commitment to defending Türkiye's territorial integrity, including through the deployment of additional Patriot air defence systems. For more details on the Middle East situation, please visit UNHCR's Data Portal.

Protection-Assistance & Advocacy

Protection and Access to Services

On 13 March, at a training organized by the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, UNHCR delivered a presentation on "the fundamental principles of international refugee law, and international protection procedures and appeal mechanisms under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection" to around 2,000 lawyers. The trained lawyers will be engaged in legal aid and legal aid clinic activities in various provinces.

Throughout March, UNHCR's field offices in Gaziantep, Izmir, and Istanbul followed up on hundreds of cases involving more than 300 individuals from diverse nationalities, including Syrians, Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, Lebanese, and others. Several of these cases needed child protection support, response to gender-based violence, and targeted assistance for persons with specific needs. UNHCR provided counselling support, conducted protection interviews, coordinated with lawyers, and referred cases to partner organizations based on assessed protection needs. Legal assistance was also sought for issues such as access to international or temporary protection (recognition of refugee status), change of residence, health insurance activation, etc.

Since January, UNHCR Counselling Line has responded to 38,600 calls from refugees and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and other countries living in 76 provinces of Türkiye. Around half of the inquiries were related to third-country resettlement, followed by legal assistance. All callers were provided with accurate information to address their queries. Several cases were referred to UNHCR's functional units or relevant organizations for necessary support.

Access to Asylum Procedures

On 26–27 March, UNHCR conducted an online training for interpreters working in 12 Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs), aimed at strengthening the sustainability of high-quality interpretation and enhancing the efficiency and integrity of status determination procedures. Eighteen interpreters (including six women) who participated in the training will assist Arabic and Farsi-speaking refugees and asylum-seekers during their interviews with Turkish authorities in various provinces. This training covered core aspects of international and temporary protection, interpretation techniques, and specialized approaches for working with persons with specific needs. It also addressed key humanitarian principles to uphold best interests of the child, professional ethics, and codes of conduct, contributing to improved standards in interpretation services across protection processes.

Support for Solutions

Voluntary Returns

Since 8 December 2024, as of end of March, UNHCR has monitored the voluntary repatriation of over 479,000 Syrians. Currently, UNHCR monitors returns at 23 PDMM offices in 22 provinces and at six border crossings in the south-east, including the one in Akçakale. UNHCR is also present at İstanbul and Sabiha Gökçen Airports in İstanbul and at Esenboğa Airport in Ankara, as well as İstanbul Arnavutköy Temporary Accommodation Centre.

Resettlement and complementary pathways:

So far in 2026, UNHCR has submitted 1,264 resettlement applications (727 Afghans, 418 Syrians, 104 Iranians and 15 refugees from other countries of origin), mainly to Canada, France, Australia, Ireland and Finland. During this period, 327 refugees (151 Syrians, 136 Afghans, 17 Iranians and 23 refugees from other countries of origin) have departed on resettlement to Australia, Canada, Ireland, Finland and the United Kingdom. In March, as part of UNHCR facilitated complementary pathways, one refugee student departed to Slovenia to enroll in a Master's program in Kinesiology at the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI).

Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion

On 31 March, UNHCR Türkiye and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Office for Türkiye signed a Letter of Understanding establishing a framework for cooperation to promote economic inclusion and access to decent work for refugees and host communities in Türkiye. The partnership will focus on areas including labour market analysis, skills mapping, advocacy for access to formal employment, improved sectoral data on refugee employment, and strengthened collaboration with national institutions, private sector actors, and development partners, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees and the ILO-UNHCR Global Joint Action Plan.



Ms. Angela Li Rosi, UNHCR in Türkiye, and Mr. Yasser Ahmed Hassan, Director, ILO in Türkiye, signing the Letter of Understanding.

In March, UNHCR met with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to advance discussions on private sector engagement linking Türkiye and Syria. Discussions focused on leveraging Syrian-owned businesses and Turkish companies to support refugee economic inclusion and Syria's early recovery. Both sides highlighted that early recovery efforts in Syria are likely to be anchored in Türkiye, with potential reconstruction activities offering opportunities for job creation and influencing future voluntary return dynamics. IFC

underscored its interest in returnee-linked employment and enterprise expansion, encouraging a shift toward a targeted pilot with scalable business models, rather than broader refugee-focused programming in Türkiye.

Sports for Protection

On 25 March, UNHCR organized a focus group discussion with Syrian children attending sports courses within the scope of the project supported by FC Barcelona Foundation in Denizli. During the information session, UNHCR provided detailed information on the impact of sports participation on children's education, social interactions, and peer relationships, as well as on child protection principles, and children's rights. Parents were informed about how to identify and address potential protection concerns and the available referral mechanisms. Overall, parents showed support and recognition of the program's value. At the end of the information session, UNHCR also introduced its channels for communicating with communities to the parents, which they were unaware of. Several participants expressed interest and joined the WhatsApp channel via the QR codes.



Participants of the sports project .

External Relations


UNHCR Representative in Türkiye handed over a letter of gratitude to His Excellency, the Ambassador of Japan.

On 17 March, Ms. Angela Li Rosi, UNHCR Representative in Türkiye, met with Mr. Tamura Masami, Ambassador of Japan, for a courtesy call and to acknowledge Japan's continued support with the 2026 Hosei funding. Discussions covered the evolving global funding environment, UN reform dynamics, and the refugee response in Türkiye, including UNHCR's close cooperation with authorities and developments at the Iran-Türkiye border.

On 12-13 March, UNHCR hosted a delegation from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for a field visit in Istanbul, focusing on the refugee situation, return dynamics, needs and challenges as well as future support. Engagements with refugee-led organizations and beneficiaries reaffirmed UNHCR's central role in coordination and support, while highlighting key reintegration challenges in Syria, such as limited access to quality education, insufficient political and economic stability, and the lack of vocational pathways. Likewise, on 5 March, UNHCR facilitated a visit of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom to Istanbul. The visit focused on NGO partner's activities in Istanbul.

Funding Information

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

