



OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

VISIT TO TÜRKIYE

(Ankara, Adana and Gaziantep)

(20-23 May 2024)



Prepared by the OSCE PA International Secretariat

17 June 2024

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VISIT TO TÜRKIYE (ANKARA, ADANA AND GAZIANTEP)

of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

(20-23 May 2024)

Highlights of the Discussions



I. Executive Summary

From 20-23 May 2024, a delegation of ten members¹ of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration², led by its Chair OSCE PA Vice-President Daniela DE RIDDER (MP, Germany), was hosted in Türkiye by Mr. Kemal ÇELİK (MP, Türkiye), Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration.

The objective of this visit was to better understand the challenges associated with hosting over 3 million Syrian refugees since 2011 and providing them access to shelter, education, labour, health care and other services. These challenges have been furthermore compounded by the prolonged conflict in Syria as well as the economic crisis, Covid-19 pandemic and, last but not least, the devastating earthquakes which struck the refugee-hosting region of southeast Türkiye in

¹ The following Members participated in the visit: Chair Daniela DE RIDDER (MP, Germany); Vice-Chairs Kyriakos HADJIYIANNI (MP, Cyprus), Farah KARIMI (MP, Netherlands), and Gudrun KUGLER (MP, Austria); as well as Members Canan BAYRAM (MP, Germany), Kemal ÇELİK (MP, Türkiye), Kristian KLINCK (MP, Germany), Dimitrios MARKOPOULOS (MP, Greece), Özgül SAKI (MP, Türkiye) and David STÖGMÜLLER (MP, Austria). The programme of the visit is in Annex I.

² For more on the mandate and activities of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, please see: <https://www.oscepa.org/en/activities/ad-hoc-committees-and-working-groups/migration>.

February 2023. Other main topics included implementation of the March 2016 EU-Türkiye Statement, and efforts to save lives and combat irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Throughout its work, the Committee pays special attention to the treatment of, and procedures for, migrants in vulnerable categories, notably unaccompanied minors, women, victims of trafficking in human beings and gender-based violence.

The delegation was first briefed by a broad range of stakeholders in Ankara, including representatives of migration management authorities, Türkiye's Coast Guard Command, and the ministries of foreign affairs, education, health and labour. The delegation also met with provincial and district authorities in Adana and Gaziantep as well as with a broad range of international governmental organizations as well as NGOs working with refugees and migrants and involved in the earthquake recovery effort. The delegation also visited two container camps: one in Adana – the largest such camp for Syrian refugees, as well as a temporary camp set up for Syrian victims of the earthquake in İslahiye.

One key message was that Türkiye has displayed outstanding generosity and hospitality in hosting over 3.4 million refugees of whom 3.1 million are Syrian refugees. However, it has reached its capacity. It is time for Europe to step up to take on a greater share of responsibility for Syrian and other refugees. Greater efforts are also needed to address the root causes of the Syrian conflict. Turkish authorities would also like Europe to support efforts to repatriate Syrians to so-called “safe zones” established by Türkiye in northern Syria. However, many of the interlocutors stressed that the conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary returns were not currently met due to serious concerns about the security and humanitarian situation in these zones.

While achievements especially in the area of access to education of Syrian children under temporary protection were highlighted, a number of issues were also raised, notably the increased difficulty of registering and accessing services following changes made in 2022, the 25 per cent quota which prohibits new refugee registrations in many of the larger cities including Istanbul and Ankara, the difficulty of obtaining work permits, and changing attitudes of the Turkish population towards refugees. Concerns about persisting child labour and child marriage were also raised.

Tremendous efforts have been devoted to rebuilding the areas impacted by the earthquakes. Still, there is an urgent need for more international support for the recovery effort with humanitarian organizations experiencing huge funding shortfalls.

The delegation also heard about Türkiye's efforts to step up the fight against irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and also to save lives at sea. The positive impact of improved co-operation between Greece and Türkiye on reducing irregular migration in the Eastern Mediterranean was also underlined.

II. Institutional Briefings in Ankara (20 May 2024)

The official programme kicked off on 20 May in the capital Ankara with comprehensive institutional briefings by the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM); the Turkish Coast Guard Command; officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs; Health; Labour; and Education; as well as representatives of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD).

a. Presidency of Migration Management (PMM)



The OSCE PA delegation was welcomed by Migration Management President Atilla Toros who shared his insights on Türkiye's holistic approach to migration. Underlining that migration cannot be managed by a single ministry or institution, he noted that the high level of co-operation with other institutions such as the Coast Guard was bearing results.

Türkiye is trying to deal with irregular migration through effective border management, Toros emphasized, citing the mobile migration checkpoint vehicles which enable Turkish officials to determine within 2-3 minutes if a person is an irregular migrant as an example of good practice of interest to European colleagues. There are 262 such mobile units which can also check fingerprints to find out whether a person has been previously deported. Effective deportations, in line with international human rights commitments, are key in the fight against irregular migration, Toros noted, while also emphasizing that the overall capacity of removal centres in Türkiye was greater than that of all European countries combined. Most people want to return to their home countries voluntarily, he stressed. Türkiye is also fighting against illegal employment, he added.

The improved relations with Greece and Bulgaria since September 2023, and the drastic decrease in irregular migration towards these countries as a result, was another topic addressed. Türkiye is no longer a transit route for irregular migrants, Toros stressed. Türkiye has underlined that there should be no pushbacks and takes international human rights law into consideration when managing irregular migration he again stressed.

Toros predicted bottlenecks in the mid- to long-term as a result of the externalization policies being carried out by some European countries. He also highlighted the inter-connectedness of various migration areas, underlining that countries are in need of qualified labour.

Türkiye is striving to increase the number and quality of decisions on international protection (refugee status determinations)³. For years, Türkiye has been the lead refugee-hosting country. However, this could change as a result of returns of Syrians under Temporary Protection to the safe zones in northern Syria established by Türkiye, Toros stated. He informed the delegation that there have been 650,000 voluntary returns so far, and called for the EU to support further voluntary returns to these safe zones in Syria.

Toros deplored the lack of understanding for the efforts being made by Türkiye. Calling for sharing responsibility for irregular migration is not enough, he stated. There is also a need to build empathy amongst European countries, he emphasized.

Another PMM representative further briefed the delegation on the main elements of Türkiye's migration management policy: regular migration; border management; irregular migration; international protection and temporary protection; "harmonization" (integration) and communication; and migration research.

The legislative foundation for Türkiye's migration and asylum policy consists mainly of Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)(11 April 2013) and the Temporary Protection Regulation (22 October 2014). The "Office for Migration and Asylum" was established in 2008. Renamed Directorate General of Migration Management in 2013 with 81 provincial units, it was restructured into the PMM in October 2021. Furthermore, in November 2023, a Directorate General for Border Management was established under the PMM.

The PMM representative also shared the latest statistics. There are a total of 4,473,059 foreigners with the legal right to stay on the territory of Türkiye:

- 3,115,344 temporary protection holders (Syrians)
- 1,119,960 foreigners with residence permits (main nationalities: Turkmenistan, Russian Federation, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and others)
- 237,755 international protection holders (main nationalities: Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Ukraine and others)

Furthermore, since 2014, 2.1 million irregular migrants and 61,000 migrant smugglers have been apprehended. In 2023, 10,482 migrant smugglers were apprehended, the highest figure since 2019 when 9,102 migrant smugglers were apprehended. As of 16 May 2024, 4,606 migrant smugglers have been apprehended this year.

³ Since September 2018, PMM is the sole authority responsible for processing asylum applications and refugee registration in Türkiye and for refugee status determination. UNHCR and its partners continue to provide protection services, including counselling related to registration with the authorities. Moreover, UNHCR works in collaboration with PMM to identify refugees in the most vulnerable situations to see if they are eligible for resettlement. See: <https://help.unhcr.org/turkiye/information-for-non-syrians/registration-rsd-with-unhcr/>.

In the discussion, Members asked about implementation of the 2016 EU-Türkiye Statement and whether penalties under Turkish law for human traffickers and human smugglers were harsh enough. They also questioned whether the situation in Syria was stable enough for returns to take place. A PMM representative explained that safe, dignified and voluntary returns were possible to a number of safe zones which Türkiye has established in Syria and called for Europe's support in encouraging further safe and voluntary returns to these areas. He furthermore underlined that most Syrians coming to Türkiye were single men between the ages of 18 and 25 and that if there were security concerns in Syria they would also bring their families. In response to a question as to whether the land border between Türkiye and Syria was completely closed or whether there were points where Syrians could apply for protection, the PMM representative informed the delegation that the border is not fully closed and that there are customs and safe gates enabling entries into Türkiye from safe zones in northern Syria.

The need to improve conditions of migrants and refugees, especially in detention centres, and the need to provide NGOs access to these centres, was also emphasized by a member of the OSCE PA delegation. A PMM representative responded that there was a lot of disinformation surrounding detention centres, that there was 24-hour CCTV monitoring in these facilities. There are both announced and unannounced public inspections of these facilities, he noted, including by the Council of Europe's anti-torture Committee⁴ and the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TIHEK). Immediate inspections are carried out if there are reports of ill treatment, PMM stated.



In response to a question on how Türkiye can address irregular migration to Cyprus through the north of the island, PMM informed the delegation that officials there were being trained to use the same migration IT system in place in Türkiye.

Irregular migration also happens via commercial flights. Such irregular migrants are interviewed upon landing and if there are suspicions that they could be foreign terrorist fighters, they are sent back.

Regarding whether Türkiye has seen an increase in arrivals of Palestinians, the PMM representative condemned the human rights violations committed by Israel and noted that those in need of medical treatment come to Türkiye.

⁴ The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has carried out a number of visits to Türkiye (see: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/turkiye>).

On the issue of whether pushbacks from Greece and Bulgaria were still happening, the PMM representative underlined the smooth co-operation with these countries which enables Türkiye to prevent irregular migration through its land borders towards these two countries. If Türkiye closes its border, it expects these two countries not to carry out any pushbacks he noted.

Asked about the availability of legal assistance to migrants being checked by mobile migration checkpoint vehicles, PMM stated that NGOs offer legal support.

The difficulty of checking documents of Afghan nationals and whether deportations to Afghanistan and Iran were being carried out by Türkiye were also raised. PMM replied that the checking of documents was not an issue as there is great dialogue between Türkiye and Afghanistan. Türkiye carries out deportations to 192 countries of origin, the PMM representative noted.

The need to pay special attention to vulnerable groups, especially pregnant women and unaccompanied minors, was also emphasized by the PA delegation.



Following the end of the discussion, the delegation was shown around a mobile migration checkpoint vehicle which aim to identify irregular migrants and migrant smugglers.

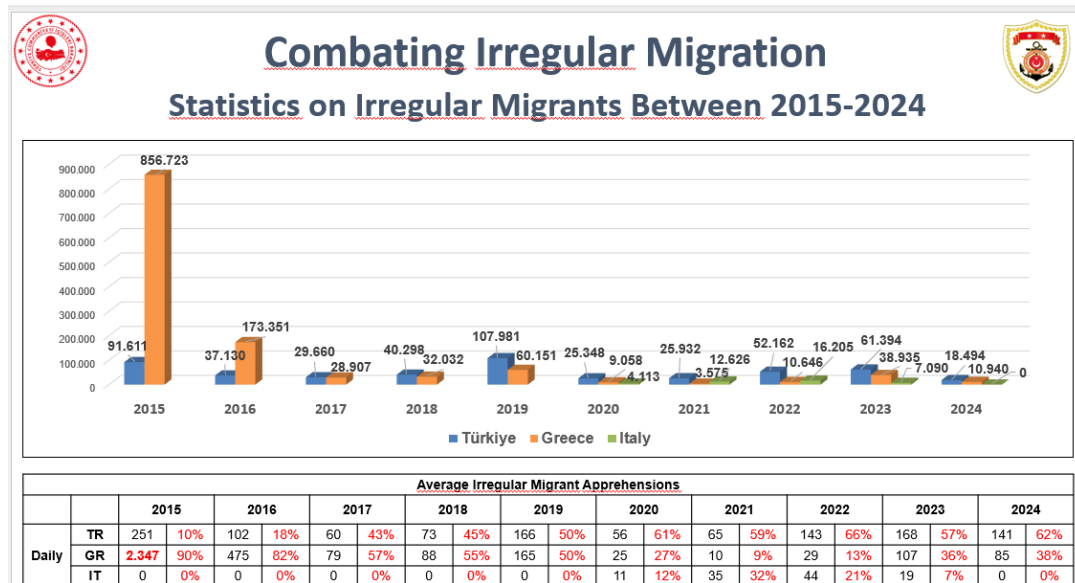
b. Turkish Coast Guard Command



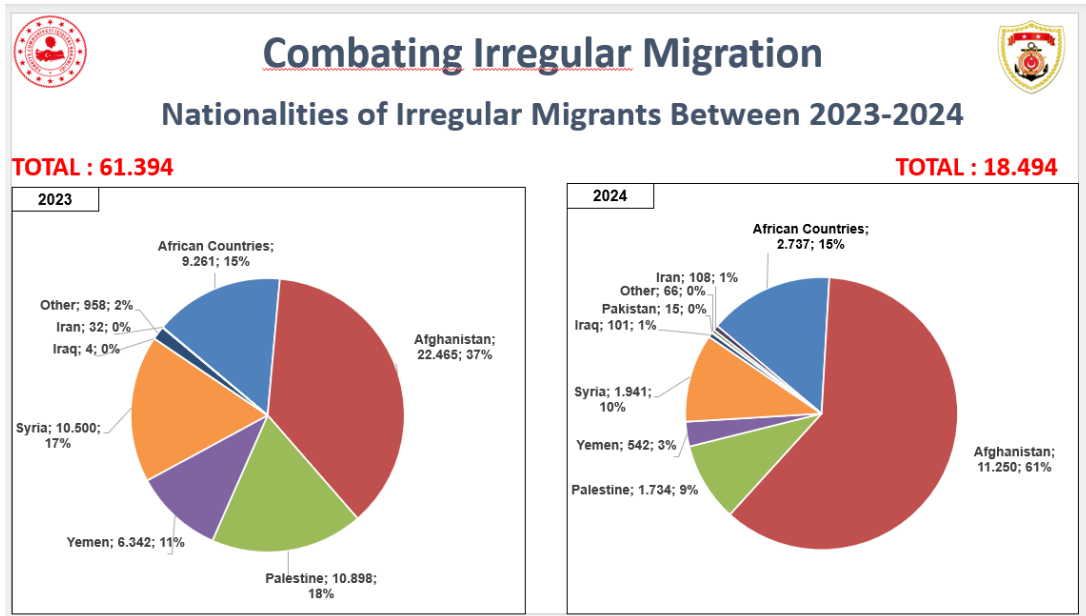
The Turkish Coast Guard Command provided a comprehensive briefing on its various areas of responsibility with a focus on combatting irregular migration and saving lives. Since July 2016, the TCGC has been affiliated with the Ministry of Interior as an “armed general law enforcement force”. The TCGC carries out its various activities in coordination with 17 different ministries. Its personnel, currently numbering 8,750, is

projected to increase to 18,000 by 2036.

The TCGC performs Search and Rescue (SAR) operations within specific areas in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. A total of 24,826 SARs were carried out in 2023; there have thus far been 6,792 such operations in 2024. According to the TCGC, thanks to measures taken, the number of irregular migrants arriving in Greece from Türkiye declined in 2023 to 38,935. In 2024, average daily arrivals in Greece were down to 85 compared to a peak of 2,347 in 2015.



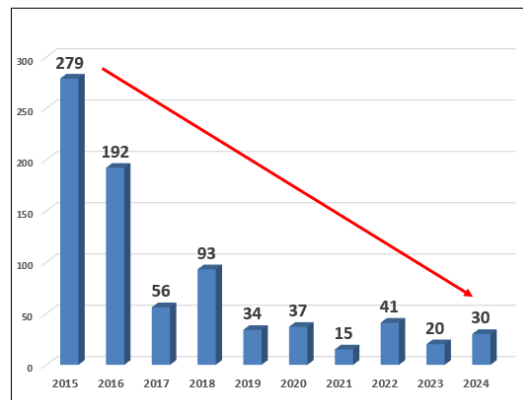
Source: Turkish Coast Guard Command, Ankara, 20 May 2024.



Source: Turkish Coast Guard Command, Ankara, 20 May 2024.

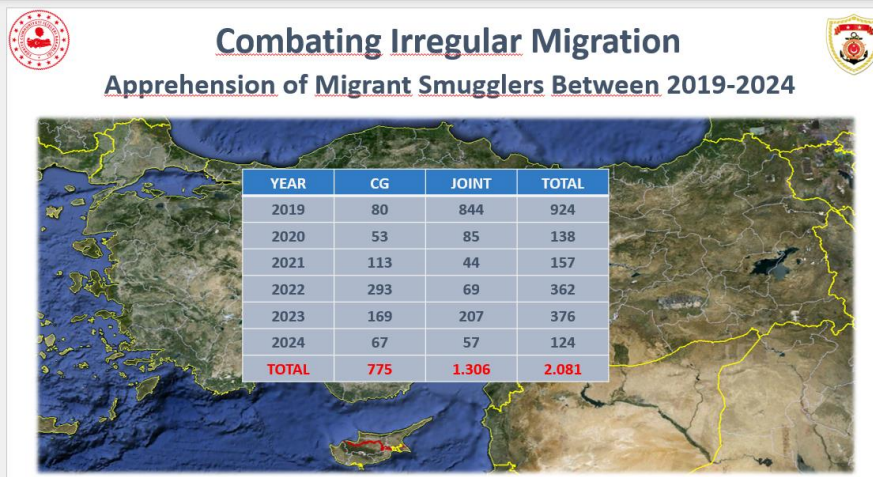
The TCGC's priority focus is on saving human lives. As a result of activities it has carried out, the number of migrants who lost their lives in 2023 decreased to 20, As of May 2024, 30 irregular migrants had lost their lives.

The TCGC representative also underlined that the number of irregular crossings from Türkiye to Italy which numbered 7,060 in 2023, had dropped to zero in 2024 as a result of the measures taken.



The TCGC also informed the delegation that attempts in August 2017 to create a new migratory route from Türkiye to Bulgaria and Romania via the Black Sea were blocked thanks to the high level of co-ordination between civil administration authorities, in particular governors of the provinces bordering the Black Sea, and law enforcement agencies. Consultations with potential destination countries of Bulgaria and Romania also contributed to these results.

A total of 2,081 migrant smugglers have been apprehended by the TCGC since 2019 including through joint operations with other law enforcement agencies.



The TCGC pays special attention to international partnerships and co-operation. Additionally, it maintains bilateral co-operation activities with 22 countries, participates in multilateral co-operation organizations of coast guard agencies around the world and provides training for friendly and allied countries. It does not, however, engage in joint operations.



In the discussion, the delegation inquired about smuggling networks and whether penalties under Turkish law were strong enough. A TCGC representative pointed out that this was a lucrative business and that greater numbers of smugglers are being apprehended by authorities on land. In 2023, smugglers from 15 different countries were apprehended, including Türkiye, Syria, Russia, Ukraine, as well as

some Central Asian countries. The TCGC representative also highlighted the irregular migration route from Syria to Lebanon to the southern part of Cyprus. The penalties for migrant smuggling were deemed sufficient as the lower limit was raised from 3 to 5 years' imprisonment (maximum: 8 years' imprisonment). Furthermore, following another legal amendment, the state can now confiscate vessels involved in smuggling.

Collaboration with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – Frontex – had not been very close as the TCGC had documented the involvement of Frontex elements in pushbacks. However, collaboration is now expected to increase. In conclusion, the TCGC was commended by the PA delegation for their efforts to save lives and to respect the humanity of migrants.

c. Joint Briefings by Government Officials

A joint briefing by officials from the ministries of Foreign Affairs; Health; Labour; and Education; as well as representatives of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) was organised on the premises of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) in Ankara on 20 May.



❖ Migration Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Head of the Migration Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Zeynep Gizem Hançerli, highlighted the work of her department which acts as a bridge between international organizations and the PMM. Türkiye is in a delicate geographical position, she stressed. Previously a transit country, it is now also a destination country. However, due to economic concerns, people are trying to leave Türkiye to go to Europe. She also emphasized the crucial importance of international solidarity and co-operation in addressing the challenge of irregular migration, calling upon the international community to develop strategies to address the problem at its source, for example through development aid. The need for enhanced border security due to issues at Türkiye's eastern border was also highlighted, with the EU financing an integrated border security system.

The MFA representative also noted that 70 per cent of the work of the Coast Guard consists of preventing irregular migration. Migrant smugglers were abusing the visa exemptions, using various transit countries to reach destination countries. As a result, Türkiye had to shut down the e-visa application system for 41 countries two years ago and has introduced an airport visa transit.

The issue of irregular migration from Afghanistan was also raised. If Afghans overstay, they face an entry ban, the MFA representative noted. Most of them are young men, rather than vulnerable women. Türkiye does not practice pushbacks of Afghans to Iran, she emphasized, although it does carry out security checks

along the border. PMM facilitates voluntary returns of single men, not families, via flights, she said.

Türkiye strives to send irregular migrants back immediately, she underlined. Even in the case of resettlements of refugees towards EU countries, there is a waiting period in order not to create a 'pull effect'.

The MFA representative called for the EU to support Türkiye's efforts to build settlements in Northern Syria. She also highlighted the challenges associated with the irregular route from Lebanon to Cyprus.

The change in attitudes of the Turkish public towards Syrian refugees was also noted, with economic concerns and fatigue cited as primary reasons. Public opinion is more sensitive now concerning irregular migration she acknowledged.

❖ **Ministry of Health**

Representatives from the Ministry of Health provided an overview of the various levels of health services provided to migrants since 2011. Syrians under TP can benefit from health care services in their province of residence free of charge. They can also access health care outside of their province of residence if they have permission and have a health referral. 44 migrant health centres (MHCs) provide primary health care in 32 provinces, mostly in areas with large migrant populations. The majority of the support personnel are Syrians. Services include mental and psycho-social support services, dental health, reproductive health, vaccinations, cancer screenings, etc.

Mobile health services are available to migrants in rural areas or to those whose access to health care services has been disrupted. NGOs can also provide health care services to TP beneficiaries in "voluntary health facilities" if their application is approved by the Ministry of Health. There are 11 such voluntary health facilities in 5 provinces (Ankara, Gaziantep, Hatay, Istanbul, Kilis). Similar health care services are also provided at Temporary Accommodation Centres and removal centres with EU support under FRIT (EU Facility for Refugees in Türkiye).

In the discussion, one delegation member asked about the reliance on EU support and was informed that EU funding covers only a small share of the overall migrant health care budget (e.g., only 3 per cent of vaccination initiatives). The Ministry representative emphasized that health care services were provided without discrimination based on nationality. Some (emergency) services were also available to irregular migrants at removal centres. Asked about the duration of access to health care, the Ministry representative clarified that there was no time limitation for the provision of free primary health care (through family physicians).

Priority areas highlighted by the Ministry representative included ambitions to digitalize migrant health services as well as the need to set up new migrant health centres following the earthquakes. She also underlined the importance of mental health care.

❖ **Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD)**

AFAD was established in 2009 under the office of the Prime Minister, replacing the various agencies dealing with these issues. It was re-formed in 2018 as an agency under the Interior Ministry with the mandate to prevent disasters and minimize disaster-related damages; plan and coordinate post-disaster responses; and promote co-operation among various government agencies. AFAD has introduced a novel disaster management model which prioritizes Turkey's transition from crisis management to risk management – which came to be known as the Integrated Disaster Management System. AFAD currently has 81 provincial branches across Turkey in addition to 11 search and rescue units.

The AFAD Director General for Disaster Response, Dr. Sadi Ergin, focused on the impact of the February 2023 earthquakes which affected 14 million people in 11 provinces and 124 districts. A total of 53,614 persons died and a further 107,213 were injured. Over 50,000 volunteers assisted with the rescue effort. Refugees were helped on an equal basis with citizens, he emphasized. A total of 3.5 million people were taken out of the earthquake zone and accommodated in hotels, dormitories and other facilities including 428 container camps for 700,000 people. Food was provided for 4 million people each day. Rental support in the total amount of 23 billion TL was provided to those who were able to find housing and 76,000 new housing units have been handed over.

The discussion focused on rebuilding efforts as well as the economic impact of the earthquakes, estimated at 104 billion USD. While the AFAD representative was not able to provide an exact figure on the number of refugees and migrants who perished, he informed the delegation that 7,742 foreigners lost their lives.

❖ **Ministry of Labour and Social Security**

Director General Ali Aybey highlighted the measures to promote the access of foreigners – in particular Syrians under TP – to the labour market, and the legislative basis for these measures as provided for by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and the 2016 International Labour Force Law. Aybey underlined that, while in 2016 Türkiye was in need of an international labour force, conditions had changed since the Covid-19 pandemic. He also touched upon employment quotas in enterprises of Syrians under TP. These enterprises must also demonstrate that they are financially strong. The application for work permits is facilitated by an e-permit system. The fee for work permits (paid by the employer) for TP holders is one third of the normal amount (7,400 TL/about €200). They need to work in their province of registration. There are also a number of jobs which are not open to Syrians under TP.

All foreigners with work permits have social security and universal health coverage. Audits are carried out to ensure compliance with labour market regulations; sanctions are issued if necessary.

The discussion touched upon bureaucratic obstacles for migrants to accessing work permits. The representative of the Ministry of Labour denied that there were administrative obstacles, noting that it is the employer, not the applicant, who fills out work permit applications. Rather, he highlighted the low level of education of Syrians as a main obstacle to accessing employment. FRIT funding is also used to finance ten information centres to provide information on how to access the labour market. The rate of approval of work permit applications is 81% overall, and 83% for Syrian refugees, he noted. According to the latest available data from 2022, 200,000 work permits for refugees were approved.

The issue of child labour was also raised. The delegation was also informed that basic school age children were not allowed to work and that district governors were taking the necessary measures to address this issue. Children were perhaps being forced to work by their families. The low level of education of Syrians was also mentioned as a possible cause of child labour. Türkiye is serious about addressing this problem, it was underlined. It has ratified the relevant ILO conventions and is carrying out inspections with EU and other international funding to eliminate child labour.

❖ **Ministry of Education**

The representative of the Ministry of Education highlighted the high enrolment rates for refugees in Türkiye, especially at the primary and secondary levels. Indeed, 1,006,821 (76.44 %) students of the entire refugee population of school age (5-17 years old) were enrolled as of 1 May 2024.⁵

Looking specifically at Syrians under Temporary Protection (Syrians), the overall enrollment rate is slightly lower at 75.65 %. However, enrollment rates at the primary school and lower secondary levels are as high as 90.85 % and 93.53 % respectively. Enrollment rates at pre-school level are lower at 47.40 %.

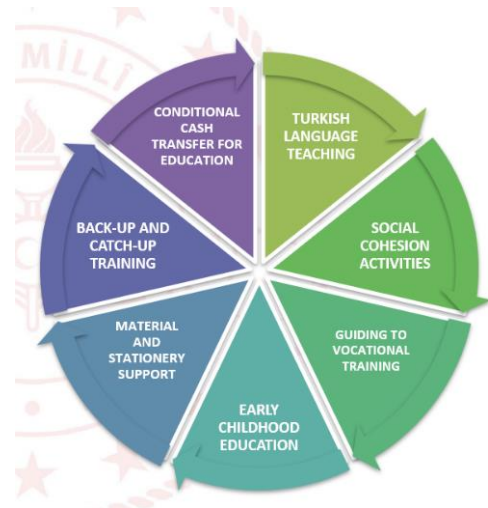
Data on access to education for Students under Temporary Protection

⁵ According to figures from September 2023, there are 1,317,122 refugees of school age (5-17 years old) out of a total refugee population of 4,708,555.

Number of Schooled Students under Temporary Protection (Syria) According to School Levels in the 2023 – 2024 Academic Year					
Level	Male	Female	Grand Total	School Age Population	Schooling Rate
Pre-school	28.913	27.137	56.050	118.239	47,40%
Primary School	188.811	176.189	365.000	401.758	90,85%
Lower School	142.760	135.833	278.593	297.857	93,53%
Upper School					
Vocational Center	12.719	2.455	112.217	255.267	43,96%
Open Education School	4.624	4.940			
Grand Total	414.802	397.058	811.860	1.073.121	75,65%

Source: Ministry of Education, May 2024.

The delegation was informed that, as of June 2020, all the temporary education centres set up for Syrian refugees to provide education in their own language had been closed and that they were now attending regular schools. The Ministry representative underlined that various measures were being implemented to ensure that all refugee students, especially students under Temporary Protection, benefit from educational services and to ensure their social cohesion. One initiative aimed at promoting the access of refugee children to education is the PIKTES project launched in October 2016 with EU support.⁶



In order to increase the Turkish proficiency level of refugee students and ensure their integration to the Turkish education system, adaptation classes were created in 2019. The Ministry also implements a number of social cohesion programmes and programmes to enhance social and emotional skills and offers vocational and technical education programmes for young people. Conditional cash support is available to encourage school attendance (conditional cash transfer for education

programme⁷). Scholarships are also available for both refugee and host community students to attend vocational and technical education programmes.

⁶ “Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES)” is an education project implemented by the Ministry of National Education and funded by a direct EU grant within the scope of the “Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT)”. The Project was launched in October 2016 and operates in 26 provinces. PIKTES II ran from December 2018 until October 2022. It has been replaced by PIKTES+. <https://piktes.gov.tr/Home/IndexENG>.

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/turkiye/en/conditional-cash-transfer-education-ccte-programme>.

The Ministry of National Education offers free courses within the scope of non-formal education activities within public education centres (3,754 course programs in 75 fields). The number of trainees benefiting from public education centres reached 3.9 million between 2014 and 2024 (women represented 54 % of participants). Courses are also organized by public education centres to ensure personal, social and cultural development in repatriation centres. A total of 29,997 trainees participated in these courses in 2022 and 2023. Playrooms can be established for children in these centres, as needed, and teachers can be assigned by Governorships in some centres.

Türkiye has also been hosting Ukrainian refugees since March 2022. In the 2023-2024 academic year, there were 3,516 Ukrainian students in public schools.

Students who graduate from schools affiliated with the Education Ministry can apply to the universities of their choice through the Foreign Student Examination and Higher Education Institutions Examination. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 58,213 Syrian students were in higher education, up from 53,097 the previous year.

Syrian Students in Higher Education

Academic Year	Male	Female	Total
2021-2022	31.666	21.431	53.097
2022-2023	32.890	25.323	58.213

Source: Ministry of Education, May 2024.

In the discussion, members asked whether enrolment could be boosted to cover the remaining 10% of children not in school. It was also noted that enrolment did not necessarily translate into attendance. The low levels of higher education attendance were explained by the pressure to enter the job market as soon as possible. The Ministry of Education representative also underlined that refugee students did not face any discrimination or bullying in Turkish schools. Under the EU-funded PIKTES programme, activities are carried out to promote harmonisation/social integration. As there are no quotas, however, there are schools where all the students are refugees. Ideally, for social cohesion purposes, the share of refugee children should not exceed 20-30 % the Ministry representative noted, in order to be able to teach them the Turkish language.

III. Visit to Sarıçam Temporary Accommodation Centre, Adana (21 May 2024)

The District Governor of Sarıçam, Mr. Murtaza Dayanç, and the Vice-Director of Sarıçam Temporary Accommodation Centre, Mr. Mesut Akhan Erdemir, first provided an overview of this facility targeted at vulnerable Syrians under temporary protection and the services provided. An NGO representative was also present.

Sarıçam TAC was originally set up in 2011 as a tent camp, and was converted to a container city in 2017. It is the biggest facility for refugees in the country (835,000 m², 4,835 containers), with a capacity of 19,445, current occupancy is 12,576 Syrians under Temporary Protection mostly from persons with special needs or vulnerable groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, orphans, elderly persons). About 55% of the camp's residents are between the ages of 0-17 years. Women and girls account for 51%. There are about 250 elderly persons (65+).



525 staff provide a range of services including education (with UNICEF support) from primary until high school, health care, seven mosques, firefighting, and cleaning and technical services. Total installation cost was 220 million TL, and average monthly management expenses are 4.5 million TL. There are five schools in the camp: two primary schools, two secondary

schools and one high school, totaling 196 classrooms and 5,639 pupils/students. There are also community education and training programmes, 13 Masters instructors, as well as courses in the area of e.g. elderly care, agriculture and greenhouse production, and Turkish language classes.

There are 42 health care personnel staffing the dental clinic, a psychiatric clinic, an obstetric gynecology clinic as well as an emergency centre providing 24 hour services. The majority of the staff at the centre are Syrian. There are also seven interpreters. Only emergency births can take place in Sarıçam TAC; others are referred to the hospital outside the camp.



The Kizilaykart cash-based assistance programme, implemented through the Turkish Red Crescent and WFP, provides 300 TL/person/month to spend at designated markets within the camp to cover basic needs. In April 2024, a total amount of 1,233,300 TL was topped up on 1,022 cards for a total of 4,111 persons.

Security is ensured by 96 (contracted) private security officers and 469 cameras operating 24/7.

In the discussion, members heard that containers are also being added to accommodate new arrivals. There is no time limitation as to how long Syrians under TP can stay in the camp, as long as they comply with the rules. The camp's residents are allowed to leave the premises of the camp, for example if they have a work permit or to visit relatives. Visits in the camp are allowed but not in the residents' containers. However, if their absence exceeds a certain limit, then their right to stay at the camp may be re-assessed.



On the issue of gender-based violence, the delegation was informed that there had been no such reports to the police station within the camp. This was also confirmed by the staff of the health centre. Some members also inquired whether there were any contacts with local communities as the Sarıçam camp appears quite isolated. They were informed that the location had been chosen due to the milder climate and that public transportation connections to the centre of Adana were available and that no complaints had been received. The representative of the NGO "Ülfet" provided more details about her organization's activities to foster social cohesion amongst women and youth such as joint sports activities and cooking events with the participation of local communities.

The discussion also touched upon access to employment of Syrians and whether they experienced lower wages. This was not perceived to be an issue by the District Governor. On the issue of child marriage and child pregnancy was also raised, marriage under the age of 18 is illegal in Türkiye, the delegation was told. According to the health centre staff, child marriages and underage pregnancies in Sarıçam TAC are on the decrease. Early marriage prevention/awareness training is also provided.

Following the visit to Sarıçam TAC, the delegation met with the Governor of Adana, Mr. Yavuz Selim Köşger, for an informal discussion of the key takeaways.

IV. Gaziantep (22-23 May 2024)

a. Meeting with NGOs working with Syrian refugees

On the morning of 22 May in Gaziantep an additional meeting with two NGO representatives working with Syrian refugees – themselves refugees from Syria – was organized by the OSCE PA International Secretariat and attended by the whole delegation.

In their remarks, they highlighted the plight of internally-displaced persons within Syria, underlining the dangerous security situation in the north which is still experiencing shelling and bombing. Praising the generosity of Türkiye in welcoming such large numbers of refugees, they expressed understanding that the situation was different now due to economic concerns and the 2023 earthquakes. Following the change in registration regulations, it has become more difficult to register for temporary protection and also to obtain a permit as a tourist. Work permits have to be renewed each year and this is a long and stressful process. There are also geographical limitations associated with TP status. The lack of legal status of many Syrians who have been living in Türkiye for over ten years without documents, was also raised, with an appeal to take additional steps to include Syrians in Turkish society with the participation of refugee representatives themselves. Limitations placed on the work of Syrian NGOs in Türkiye were also mentioned, e.g. the restriction on the thematic areas where NGOs can operate in.

The even greater challenges experienced by Syrian women, for example in finding employment as well as sexual harassment and exploitation in the labour market and in removal centres, were also touched upon. Lack of knowledge of the Turkish language is a main challenge for Syrian women.

The need to focus on the roots of the Syrian conflict was emphasized by the NGO representatives. The severe shortage of funding which humanitarian organizations are currently experiencing was also highlighted. With only 6% of funding needs covered, many humanitarian staff would have to be let go soon. Women and children in particular are in a very vulnerable situation in northwest Syria. The earthquake also struck northern Syria where most IDPs are still living in tents. With the likelihood of a new wave of refugees from Syria due to the very dire humanitarian and security situation, this will leave Türkiye very vulnerable they noted. Syrians in Türkiye are faced with two choices: to return to northern Syria or to flee to Europe. However, return to Syria is a difficult choice for those whose children were born in Türkiye and do not speak Arabic. Furthermore, it is not perceived as an option for those who do not originate from those areas and have no family or networks there. Many Syrian refugees therefore do not see a future for themselves in Syria and will therefore seek to flee to Europe, especially those who do not have Turkish citizenship. The changes in the demographic makeup of the Northern Syria Buffer Zone were also discussed.

The members of the PA delegation thanked the NGO representatives for their contributions, acknowledging that Türkiye is facing challenges and that it has reached its capacity for hosting refugees and welcomed the sharing of recommendations on how to address these challenges notably concerning work permits. One concrete recommendation emanating from the exchange with the NGO representatives was to create consultative mechanisms to enable the participation of refugees in decisions affecting them.

b. Briefings with relevant institutions and international organizations

The delegation then continued to a joint briefing by representatives of the main international organizations involved in supporting refugees in southeastern Türkiye in the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes, as well as with representatives of the Provincial Directorate for Migration Management (PDMM) in Gaziantep province and the MFA.



❖ UNHCR

Noting that Türkiye has been a focal point for migration, especially from Syria, with 3.2 million Syrians under temporary protection while also hosting 222,000 refugees and asylum seekers from various countries, UNHCR highlighted that the sheer scale of this influx poses significant logistical, social, and economic challenges. Türkiye has displayed huge generosity and hospitality, as well as a progressive approach to refugee inclusion it was noted.

While praising the current level of co-operation between humanitarian organizations and the government, one of the primary challenges mentioned was the need to strengthen the protection environment – and access to quality, fair and efficient procedures, as well as access to social support mechanisms. Registration was pointed out as crucial for ensuring that individuals in need of international protection can access essential services and support. The protection environment encompasses legal, social, and economic dimensions, requiring a coordinated effort from all parties where UNHCR plays a vital role. UNHCR focuses on developing durable solutions, e.g. by ensuring that support is provided not only to refugees but also to host communities. UNHCR also stated that the conditions for returns to Syria in safety and with dignity were not currently present.

It is nevertheless observing the situation of those who chose to return spontaneously, carrying out interviews to ensure that they are returning voluntarily.

The remarks focused on the southeast which hosts 1.7 million refugees, and is currently facing additional challenges due to the impact of 2023 earthquakes. Providing shelter, core relief items, cash assistance, and protection monitoring were acknowledged as main priorities of UNHCR's work.

Resettlement processing for the most vulnerable refugees, particularly unaccompanied children and women at risk, is also expedited. Based on the data presented, in 2023, over 16,800 resettlement submissions were made, with a significant portion from the earthquake region. Additionally, capacity development to support national institutions, border authorities, and civil society were indicated as essential for meeting the specific needs of refugees and promoting social cohesion. UNHCR endorses engagement with the private sector to provide assistance and long-term livelihood opportunities for refugees in order to promote sustainable integration.

UNHCR cooperates with the Ministry of National Education to provide vocational training and with governmental institutions for higher education. Türkiye is the country with the highest number of refugees in higher education, it was underlined. UNHCR also works with the national employment agency and the Ministry of Labour to ensure access to the labour market.

During the discussion, it was recalled that while humanitarian work is effective in minimizing the negative effects of conflicts, it cannot solve them. The true root cause can only be addressed at the political level. Additionally, UNHCR pointed out that the absence of conflict does not necessarily means peace and safety; this needs to be remembered when talking about returns. For voluntary repatriation to begin, all citizens need to have unhindered access to all services.

In response to a question about conditions in removal centres, the UNHCR representative noted that some removal had been upgraded with EU funding but concurred that the situation was not great due to over-crowding. UNHCR also tries to identify alternatives to detention. It was also noted that the population of removal centres does not fully fall within UNHCR's mandate.

UNHCR also highlighted the serious funding fatigue as one of the main challenges which humanitarian organizations are facing.

❖ **IOM**

The IOM representatives emphasized that the majority of the 3,120,430 Syrians under temporary protection reside outside the camps, with only 59,796 in camps near the Syrian border. This underscores the challenge of integrating a large number of refugees into urban settings, where they must compete for limited resources and services. IOM shared their experience with new challenges emanating from the 2023 earthquake. While the Southeast region was already a priority due to its lower socio-economic standing, it now faces increased pressure

to catch up while still dealing with the impact of the 2023 disaster. High unemployment is a big concern. There has been an increase in the number of refugees – both registered and unregistered – going to Europe because of difficulties. This is also a region where many minorities live, the IOM representative noted, emphasizing the importance of also addressing the needs of local communities, not only those of refugees, in order not to fuel tensions. IOM also underlined that one of its priorities is to facilitate regular migration pathways.

During the discussion, the IOM representatives identified several key challenges. Apart from the global issues of funding and capacity building, they emphasized the importance of coordination among national and international bodies. Overlaps in the work of humanitarian organizations can lead to lower efficiencies. Therefore, improved coordination and a clearer division of responsibilities are essential to maximize their efforts.

❖ **UNICEF**

Experts from UNICEF shed light on the situation of children and adolescents, particularly those from the Syrian refugee population. They highlighted positive developments as well as issues in various domains, including education, child protection, health, social policy, early childhood development, and more. Based on the data shown, 1,538,389 of the Syrian population under temporary protection are aged 0-18 and 26.7% of Syrian children under temporary protection are aged 0-4, indicating a high need for childhood development programs and parental support.

In terms of early childhood development, issues related to child mortality and nutrition were mentioned. Infant mortality is at 22 per 1,000 births, and under-5 mortality is 27 per 1,000 births – almost 3 times higher than the national average for Türkiye. Nutritional challenges including stunting, overweight, and a wasting among children under five remained relatively stable. According to UNICEF, child labour is prevalent, with 20.3% of children aged 12-17 employed according to a 2018 survey; more recent studies indicate even higher rates among older boys. Early and forced marriages were also found as significant issues, with 9.2% of Syrian women aged 20-24 having married before age 15 and 44.8% before age 18. Adolescent pregnancy rates are alarmingly high, with 209 births per 1,000 among Syrian girls aged 15-19 years.

Education was highlighted as a successful field of accomplishment. With more than 1.3 million school-age refugee children in Türkiye (not just Syrians), enrolment rates are high: 90.43% at the primary school level, 92.47% at the lower secondary, and 48.57% in upper-secondary education. Yet some challenges still prevail. Over 300,000 children remain out of school. Pre-school attendance rates are also low, the UNICEF representative stated, noting that pre-school attendance is not mandatory. Enrolment does not necessarily mean attendance either. Barriers to education include lack of awareness, transportation constraints, language barriers, costs, and dropout issues, especially at higher education levels. The

February 2023 earthquakes exacerbated these challenges, causing damage to educational facilities, loss of teachers, and ensuing significant learning losses.

During the discussion, key challenges were discussed. The major challenges identified include the need for more funding and capacity building to address the multifaceted issues affecting children and adolescents, including mental health. The February 2023 earthquakes further highlighted the need for robust disaster response mechanisms that can cater to the needs of vulnerable populations, including those of children and adolescents.

The UNICEF representative also addressed the question of child labour in the informal labour market, as well as child marriages and child pregnancies as a result of gender-based violence, stressing that there is a duty to report these cases under Turkish law.

❖ **WFP**

The WFP focused their presentation on the multifaceted issues currently facing the southeastern regions affected by the February 2023 earthquakes. The catastrophic earthquakes have severely disrupted local food production and market systems. The impacts are being tackled by WFP's Earthquake Recovery Programme which is set to run until December 2024. One of the key challenges identified is the severe impact on micro and small private sector food system actors, including rural smallholder farmers, dairies, and retail markets. It was recalled that the affected region is also an important agricultural centre for the whole country. Provinces such as Kahramanmaraş, known for its dairy and livestock value chain, or Hatay, which plays a crucial role in the national export of fresh vegetables, are actively supported by WFP with a goal to restore businesses and increase incomes beyond pre-earthquake levels.

❖ **PDMM**

The Provincial Director of Migration Management provided an overview of the basic statistics of the migrant and refugee population, highlighting that 51% were under the age of 18. Special needs are addressed in co-operation with international agencies and NGOs. He also stressed that access to legal aid was available in removal centres and that there was co-ordination and follow up together with UN agencies after voluntary returns. Türkiye has also resettled 66,000 persons so far since 2016, he noted. Türkiye is doing its best, he stressed. Underlining the need for durable solutions, he called upon the rest of the world to also provide support.

❖ **MFA**

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also represented in the joint briefing due to the critical role which the MFA plays in managing migration-related challenges in border cities like Gaziantep. Gaziantep, as host to the second largest refugee population in the country, is a focal point for international organizations working on various humanitarian and development agendas. Therefore, the MFA

has started to act as a mediator between these entities and local governments, facilitating co-ordination and ensuring effective management of international issues at the national level. The MFA representative stressed that the migration situation is not only a national issue but also a global one, requiring a co-ordinated international response. The MFA has placed six ambassadors in various cities to address these complex dynamics.

The MFA official recalled that the migration crisis has shifted Türkiye's focus from being primarily a humanitarian donor to managing its internal challenges. The ongoing war in Syria, instability in Afghanistan, and the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes have placed immense pressure on the country's resources and infrastructure. In the discussion, the topic of Türkiye's involvement in Northern Syria was raised. It was noted that the Syrian regime's unrealistic demands for Türkiye's complete withdrawal contrast with Türkiye's security concerns, particularly regarding terrorism and the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The MFA representative made it clear that Türkiye's continued presence is crucial for maintaining regional stability and reducing terrorism within its border and that the country was not planning to withdraw given current circumstances.

c. Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilisation SGDD-ASAM



Following a lunch hosted by Gaziantep mayor Ms. Fatma Şahin, the delegation visited the premises of the Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilisation (SGDD-ASAM)⁸ where it was briefed on the activities of this NGO operating in over 30 provinces across Türkiye, providing support to asylum seekers and refugees in accessing rights and services. They also shared best practices highlighting various

projects to address the diverse needs of refugees.

An ASAM Academy initiative was presented as a unique dialogue platform for stakeholders involved in migration issues, contributing to both national and global academic literature and supporting qualitative scientific research. MigrantTV, a multi-language media platform created to keep refugees informed about developments within Türkiye and the global agenda, was also noted as a unique tool helpful for their work. Additionally, SGDD-ASAM introduced its Search and Rescue Team which participates in national training programmes and operations. In response to the devastating earthquake in 2023, SGDD-ASAM also shared its 11 projects in the earthquake-affected regions including search and rescue

⁸ <https://sgdd.org.tr/en/>.

operations, the evacuation of children under state protection, interpretation support in multiple languages, the provision of humanitarian assistance and more.

During the discussion, several key issues were raised, including the persistence of child marriages despite legal prohibitions, refugees working in the informal sector, resistance among Syrian refugees to learn Turkish, and rising tensions between Turkish society and refugees. They also mentioned cultural differences affecting refugees' integration into the Turkish labour market, particularly the challenges women face in balancing work and family responsibilities. The importance of women's empowerment and the need for daycare facilities to provide women with the flexibility to work were emphasized.

d. Field Visit to İslahiye

On 22 May in the afternoon, the delegation travelled to İslahiye, a municipality and district of Gaziantep Province with a population of 67,650 (2022). A magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck İslahiye on 6 February 2023, causing widespread devastation and many deaths.

The delegation was first briefed by the office of District Governor Mehmet Soydu on the recovery process following the February 2023 earthquakes. A total number of 1,435 persons died in İslahiye of whom 178 were Syrians; a further 1,427 persons were injured. Psycho-social support services were offered to 106,964 persons. 185,000 food parcels and 50,000 health kits were distributed. Over 90 doctors and 150 health care staff were also sent to the area.



Eleven Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs) were activated after the earthquake in Türkiye to accommodate a total of 23,000 persons in 7,000 containers. The District Governor highlighted that no one was without shelter and that all those who had been living in tents had been transferred to container camps. For 14 months, newly-formed supermarkets also offered their products for free to impacted

citizens. The reconstruction effort started already on 22 February 2023. Over 18,500 buildings were surveyed to assess damage. A total of 6,518 houses, businesses and barns have already been handed over. The housing is subsidised so tenants only need to pay a minimal amount. Moreover, citizens are also being

given full ownership of the new properties. The destruction of the local infrastructure is a huge challenge as is the lack of labour, the delegation heard.

Sharing lessons learned, the District Governor acknowledged that while the majority of destroyed buildings were old, there were also instances of newly built apartments that should have been built to suitable standards and therefore should have been able to withstand the earthquake. This shed light on a much broader issue the country has been facing for decades



when the government has offered recurring "construction amnesties" for buildings lacking the necessary safety certifications and even failed to properly endorse new regulations presented in 2018. The delegation was assured that all new constructions meet all safety standards and that the companies responsible for the previous poor management have been brought to court.

The delegation then visited İslahiye 3 Living Space, a temporary facility consisting of 338 containers currently hosting 1,645 Syrians under Temporary Protection.

The delegation was also able to visit a complex of "disaster homes" in the area of Degirmencik built for persons who had lost their homes in the earthquake and also met with a Syrian family who had just moved in.



V. Debrief

During the internal debrief, members praised Türkiye's generosity and hospitality in welcoming millions of refugees. They underlined that the government is doing its very best to host such a large number of refugees. Achievements in the area of access to education of Syrians in particular were highlighted. Still, there are huge challenges which grow as the years pass. They stressed the importance of focussing on the future of refugee children living in camps.

They need to address the security situation in Syria was also emphasized, so that people are not forced to leave. At the same time, returns to buffer zones in northern Syria should be on a voluntary basis only, they underlined.

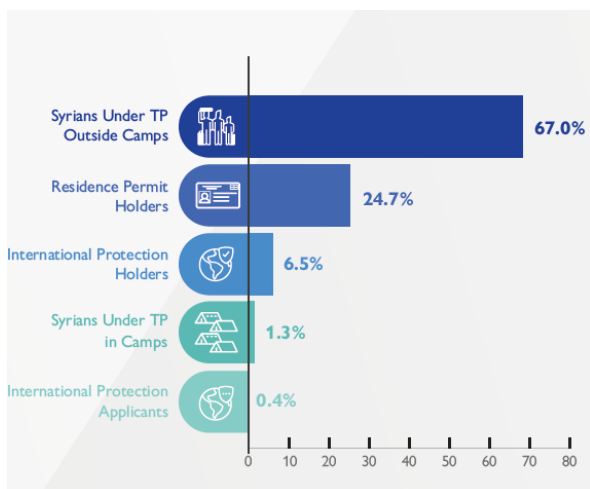
The members of the delegation agreed that there was a need for greater international solidarity with Türkiye, especially in light of the enhanced challenges following the 2023 earthquakes. The earthquakes had perhaps reinforced solidarity between Syrians and Turks it was surmised.

The importance of political dialogue and co-operation, for example between Greece and Türkiye, in addressing irregular migration was also noted. Co-operation with Cyprus would also be welcomed.

Migration is not a problem which Türkiye can solve on its own, they concurred. Rather, it is an issue which should be dealt with jointly at the EU and global levels. They agreed that the OSCE should do more to find solutions. Members also emphasized the need to protect the human rights of all migrants in Türkiye, not just of Syrians. It is also important to look ahead and be prepared for future waves of refugees also in connection with climate change.

VI. Background

a. Basic figures

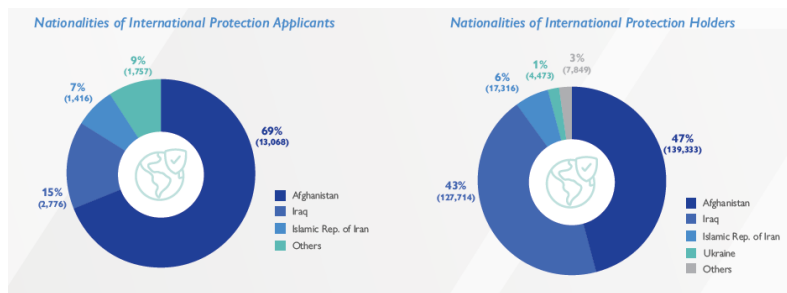


Impacted by devastating earthquakes in February 2023, Türkiye continues to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Based on the most recent data from the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), there are more than 4.5 million foreign nationals present in Türkiye, 3.4 million of whom are seeking international protection. The biggest ethnic group is formed by Syrians (3.1 million) who have been granted

Temporary Protection status (TP).⁹

The rest of the individuals under international protection come from countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Ukraine.¹⁰ Additionally, according to UNHCR, there were 296,685¹¹ refugees and asylum-seekers in Türkiye as of mid-2023.¹² The data from PMM then further show that in 2023, there were 19,017 international protection applicants in the country, making it the lowest number recorded since 2011.¹³

In addition, there are 1,129,958 foreign nationals holding residence permits. Compared to March 2023, this is a decrease of 204,192 individuals.



Along being a host country and intended destination, due to its location on migration routes from Central Asia, Middle East and even Africa towards Europe, Türkiye is also a transit country. According to PMM figures, the number of migrants in irregular situation apprehended in Türkiye reached a peak in 2019, followed by a sharp decrease in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been on the rise

⁹ IOM, DTM Türkiye - Migrant Presence Monitoring - Situation Report (March 2024), at: <https://dtm.iom.int/report-product-series/migrant-presence-monitoring-situation-report>

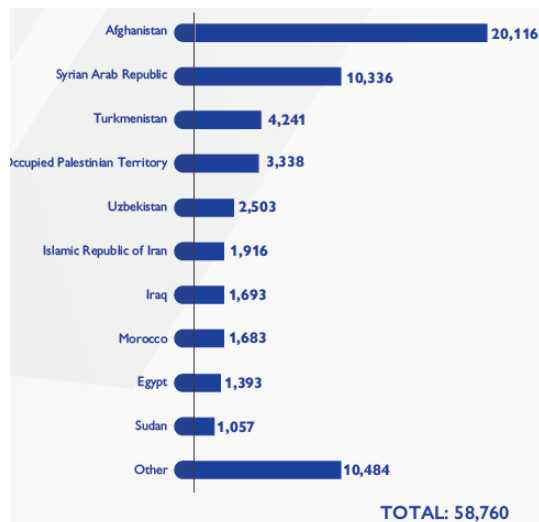
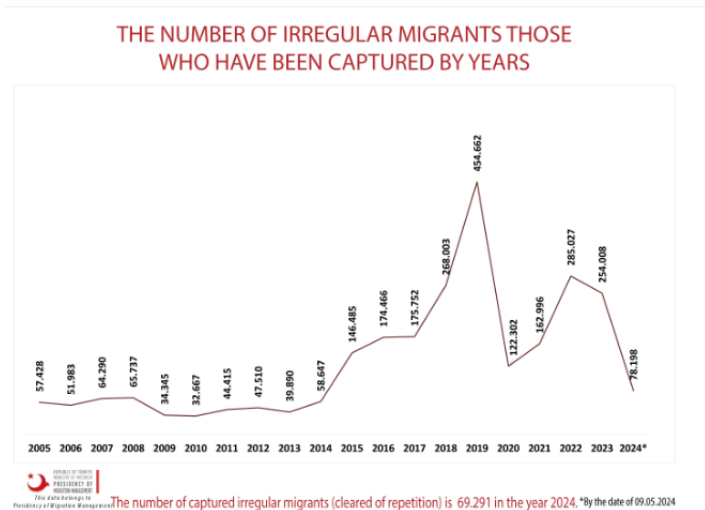
¹⁰ IOM, DTM Türkiye - Migrant Presence Monitoring - Situation Report (March 2024), at: <https://dtm.iom.int/report-product-series/migrant-presence-monitoring-situation-report>

¹¹ UNHCR, Türkiye Bi-annual Factsheet (February 2024), at: <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/factsheets-and-dashboards>.

¹² UNHCR, Türkiye Bi-annual Factsheet (February 2024), at: <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/factsheets-and-dashboards>.

¹³ PMM, International Protection Data (2024), at: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/international-protection17>

ever since. 2022 recorded the second highest yearly number of migrants in irregular situation apprehended by authorities in Türkiye. According to the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), 58,760 migrants in irregular situation of different nationalities were apprehended in Türkiye in the first quarter of 2024 compared to 88,437 in the fourth quarter of 2023.¹⁴



Top nationalities of migrants in irregular situation do not include only those who enter Türkiye irregularly but also those who enter the country through regular means but overstay their visa or visa-free period and become irregular.

The Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) recorded 3,058 migrants in irregular situation and 23 deaths in March 2024.¹⁵ Compared to March 2023, this represented an increase of 444 intercepted individuals, when 2,614 migrants in irregular situation were

recorded. These figures only include those intercepted and rescued by the TCG, while the actual number of migrants and refugees who attempt to cross from Türkiye to Europe by sea may be higher. The top ten nationalities as reported by intercepted/rescued migrants are Afghan, Palestinian, Syrian, Sudanese, Yemeni, Egyptian, Iraqi, Liberian, Congolese and Angolan.

b. Turkish Migration and Asylum Policy

Türkiye maintains a geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention and only applies it to refugees originating from European countries. In April 2013 Türkiye adopted a comprehensive Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), which establishes a dedicated legal framework for asylum in Türkiye. The law also created the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) as the agency responsible for migration and asylum, which conducts the status

¹⁴ IOM, Migrant Presence Monitoring Türkiye, Overview of Migrant Situation, Quarterly Report Q1 – January, February, March 2024, at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/dtm-turkiye-migrant-presence-monitoring-overview-situation-migrants-quarterly-report-q1-january-february-march-2024>.

¹⁵ IOM, DTM Türkiye - Migrant Presence Monitoring - Situation Report (March 2024), at: <https://dtm.iom.int/report-product-series/migrant-presence-monitoring-situation-report>

determination procedure. As of 29 October 2021, DGMM became the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM).¹⁶

The LFIP provides three types of international protection status in accordance with Türkiye's "geographical limitation" policy on the 1951 Refugee Convention:

- Persons who fall within the refugee definition of the 1951 Convention and come from a "European country of origin" qualify for refugee status under LFIP, in full acknowledgment of Türkiye's obligations under the 1951 Convention;
- Persons who fall within the refugee definition of the 1951 Convention but come from a so-called 'non-European country of origin' are instead offered conditional refugee status under LFIP. Conditional refugee status is a Turkish legal concept introduced by the LFIP for the purpose of differentiating in treatment between 1951 Convention-type refugees originating from 'non-European' states and those originating from 'European' states;
- Persons who do not fulfil the eligibility criteria for either refugee status or conditional refugee status but would however be subjected to death penalty or torture in country of origin if returned, or would be at "individualised risk of indiscriminate violence" due to situations or war or internal armed conflict, qualify for subsidiary protection status under LFIP.

For refugees from Syria, Türkiye implements a Temporary Protection (TP) regime, which grants beneficiaries a right of legal stay as well as some level of access to basic rights and services. The TP status is acquired on a prima facie, group basis, to Syrian nationals and stateless Palestinians originating from Syria. PMM is the responsible authority for the registration and status decisions within the scope of the temporary protection regime based on Article 91 of the LFIP and the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) of 22 October 2014.

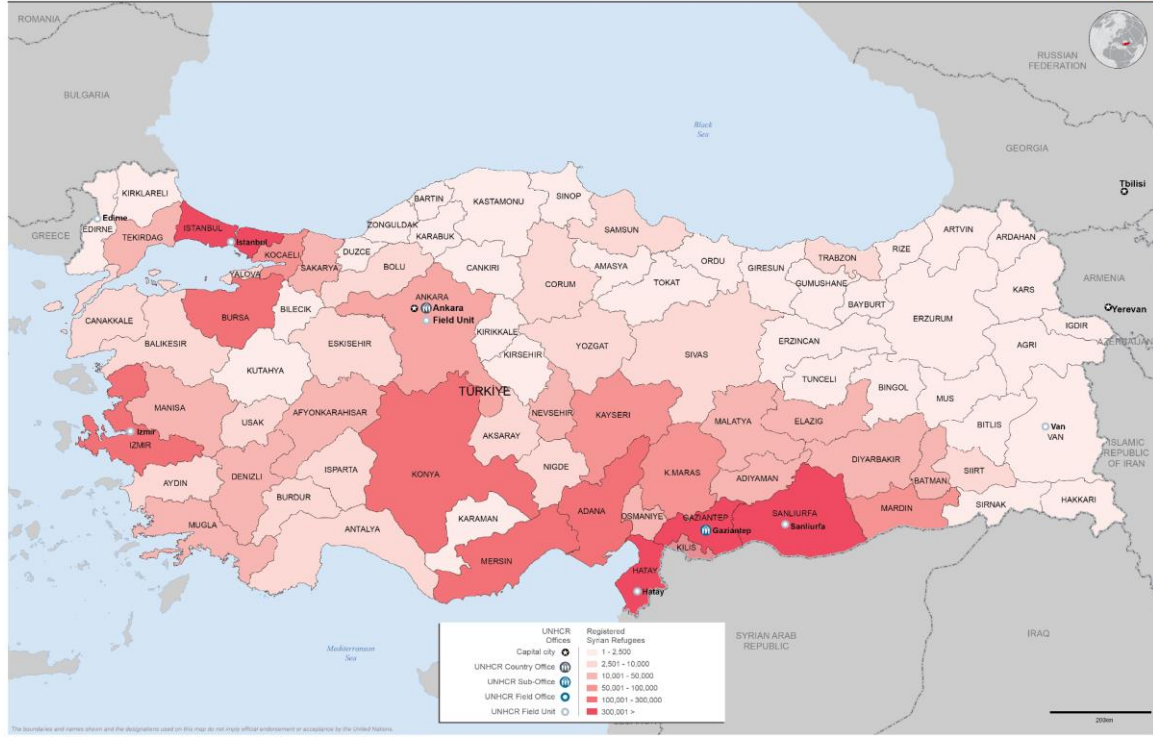
Türkiye's temporary protection regime grants 3,120,430 Syrian nationals the right to legally stay in Türkiye as well as obtain some level of access to basic services. The vast majority of Syrians under TP – 3,060,634 individuals – live outside camps, known as Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs). Only 59,796 Syrians live inside camps, the majority of which are located close to the Syrian border.

¹⁶ Country Report: Introduction to the asylum context in Türkiye, Asylum Information Database, at: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/introduction-asylum-context-turkiye/>

UNHCR Türkiye:

Provincial Breakdown of Syrian Refugees in Türkiye

as of 5 October 2023



Source: UNHCR Türkiye: Provincial Breakdown Syrian Refugees in Türkiye (as of 5 October 2023), at: <https://reliefweb.int/map/turkiye/unhcr-turkiye-provincial-breakdown-syrian-refugees-turkiye-5-october-2023>.

Changes to the law in June 2022 have made the registration of Syrians more difficult. The Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMM) are formally in charge of registering TP beneficiaries and referring them to cities. But the list of available cities changes according to capacity; if there is a health or education emergency, both groups of protection holders can be directed to other cities. Istanbul is currently closed to registration of both non-Syrians and Syrians except for justified reasons such as education, health or employment. As of June 2022, newly arrived Syrians have been referred to TACs, unless they fulfil special conditions. Türkiye gradually reactivated TACs as a result of this policy shift.

Moreover, since May 2022, it is illegal for any region or area in Türkiye to have a foreign national population that exceeds 25 per cent of the total population. This covers both individuals who have made Türkiye their permanent home and those who are passing through. With the exception of newborns and family reunification, neighbourhoods in various provinces are now closed to foreign nationals seeking address registrations for temporary protection, international protection, and residence permits, as well as changes to their city of residence if they are foreign nationals with residence permits or are under temporary or international

protection.¹⁷ This is part of the government’s “dilution” plans to prevent “ghettoization”.

Following the February 2023 earthquakes, TACs were also used to accommodate persons who lost their homes. As of June 2023, over 65,600 people were being hosted in nine TACs managed by the PMM.

c. Returns

In May 2022, Turkish President Erdoğan announced the intention to resettle one million refugees in northern Syria, in areas under Turkish security control, and that it was building 250,000 housing units and equipping them with infrastructure including education and health care facilities. Many of the refugees come from parts of Syria that remain under Assad’s control and say that they cannot return to their towns and villages while he remains in power. Once a person has agreed to be voluntarily repatriated to Syria, their TP status in Türkiye ends.

According to Turkish officials, about 500,000 Syrians had returned to those areas as of May 2023.¹⁸ According to the NGO Human Rights Watch, hundreds of Syrian men and boys, including unaccompanied children, were arrested and deported between February and July 2022.¹⁹ Human Rights Watch has also drawn attention to the dire humanitarian conditions and human rights abuses in the Turkish occupied “safe zone” of Tel Abyad in Syria and claims that many were coerced into signing voluntary return forms.²⁰

According to Human Rights Watch, Afghans, many of whom fled after the August 2021 Taliban takeover, were often unable to register asylum applications and were deported.²¹ Pushbacks of Afghans at Türkiye’s border with Iran have also been reported.

d. Vulnerable Groups

According to the LFIP, the “persons with special needs” category includes “unaccompanied minors, handicapped persons, elderly, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of torture, rape and other forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.” LGBTQI+ persons are not listed.

¹⁷ Country Report: Overview of main changes since the previous report update, Asylum Information Database, at: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/overview-main-changes-previous-report-update/>

¹⁸ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230526-turkiye-launches-syria-housing-project-for-return-of-refugees/>.

¹⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/24/turkey-hundreds-refugees-deported-syria>.

²⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/syrians-face-dire-conditions-turkish-occupied-safe-zone>.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, 2023 World Report – Turkey events of 2022, at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/turkey#81aaa4>.

There are no official statistics on the number of unaccompanied children in Türkiye but it is estimated that the majority of unaccompanied minors seeking international protection in Türkiye are from Afghanistan.²²

The situation of unaccompanied Syrian children who are covered by the temporary protection clause and whose registration is supervised by the General Directorate of Migration differs from the situation of unaccompanied children of other nationalities whose registration processes are supervised by international organizations. Unaccompanied minors not under TP do not enjoy equal access to education, health insurance, or other services such as Turkish language instruction, vocational training, or even financial support.²³

Child marriage and child labour amongst the refugee and migrant population are also of concern.

According to UNICEF, following the 2023 earthquakes, as of November 2023, 7.9 million people, including 3.2 million children, remained in need of humanitarian assistance.²⁴ While many unaccompanied and separated children have been successfully reunited with their parents or extended families, or are in government care services, close follow-up remains necessary to prevent separation and/or negative coping mechanisms. The earthquakes disrupted access to education for nearly 4 million children, including more than 350,000 refugee children. Long-term effects may include learning loss, school dropout and a negative impact on children's psychosocial well-being. As of August 2023, a significant number of children in earthquake-affected areas had still not returned to school.

Following a visit in July 2022,²⁵ the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls said that Türkiye had taken fundamental steps towards eradicating poverty and increasing support for marginalised and disadvantaged sections of society, including women and girls. At the same time, she stated that implementation of domestic legislation had been weakened by the country's withdrawal in 2021 from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), including preventive measures and services currently in place for survivors of gender-based violence.

²² The majority of African children are often recorded as 18, even at the age of 16, as they reportedly look more mature. In these cases, they are wrongly taken into administrative detention. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Asylum Information Database (AIDA), Country Report: Türkiye, 2022 Update, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/>.

²³ Syrian Dialogue Center, Impact of Refugee Experience on Unaccompanied Minor Refugees – A case study of youth hostel residents in Turkey, 13 October 2021, last updated 12 April 2022, at: <https://sydialogue.org/en/impact-of-refugee-experience-on-unaccompanied-minor-refugees/>.

²⁴ UNICEF, Country Office Annual Report 2023 - Turkey, at:

²⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/turkiye-stemming-tide-violence-against-women-and-girls-should-be-priority>.

e. Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings

Since early 2000s, Türkiye has continuously sought to strengthen its anti-trafficking response. It has ratified some of the key international legal instruments such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) has been criminalised within the Criminal Code (No. 5237, Article 80). Two National Action Plans (NAP) were developed; a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) was established; shelters and assistance became available to victims of trafficking; and the 2013 LFIP mandated the establishment of the Department for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking under the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). In March 2016, Türkiye adopted a Regulation on Combatting Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims to provide a legal framework until the adoption of a law specifically targeting human trafficking.

Based on the latest report by the US Department of State²⁶, Türkiye's efforts to combat THB show positive improvement yet challenges remain. Significant strides have been made to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. In 2021, the government identified 349 victims, an increase compared with 276 victims in 2020; of these, 361 were foreign nationals.²⁷ Standard operating procedures (SOPs) provided guidelines for identifying and referring victims to assistance and required first responders to refer potential victims to the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM). PMM interviewed 8,077 potential victims in 2021, a significant increase compared with 4,919 potential victims in 2020. The government reported screening migrants for trafficking indicators in deportation centers. PMM trained police, civil servants, migration specialists, social workers, psychologists, hotline operators, officials, and PMM staff on victim identification. The law entitled foreign victims to a temporary residence permit for 30 days, which authorities could extend up to three years with the option to apply for a work permit. The Ministry of Family and Social Services (MOFSS) operated 274 mobile teams in all 81 provinces that conducted outreach to children who were homeless or used the streets as a source of livelihood.

However, the government did not proactively identify victims in highly vulnerable refugee and migrant communities. For example, media and civil society reports continued to indicate forced repatriation to Syria without screening for indicators of trafficking. Convictions of traffickers decreased, with courts often acquitting defendants. Local NGOs were excluded from victim protection initiatives, and law enforcement occasionally pursued lesser charges with reduced penalties, notably

²⁶ 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Türkiye, U.S. Department of State, at: [https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/turkey/#:~:text=Trafficking%20victims%20in%20T%C3%BCrkiye%20are,%2C%20and%20Kyrgyz%20\(15\)](https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/turkey/#:~:text=Trafficking%20victims%20in%20T%C3%BCrkiye%20are,%2C%20and%20Kyrgyz%20(15))

²⁷ Of the 349 victims of THB identified in 2021, 201 were victims of sex trafficking, 133 were victims of forced labor, 14 were victims of child soldiering, and one victim's exploitation was not reported; 322 were female, and 81 were male; 120 were children.

“encouragement of prostitution”. Capacity limitations still hinder adequate support for victims, including the denial of accommodation for transgender individuals and reduced funding for victim assistance.

f. Migrant Smuggling

Türkiye is still a significant transit country for smuggled migrants seeking to reach Europe. It is also a destination country, especially for Iranians and Iraqis.

There has been a growing trend of people smugglers recruiting individuals from former Soviet republics in central Asia to pilot boats transporting migrants from Türkiye to Italy. In 2023, over 7,000 migrants, each paying more than €8,000, arrived on Italy's coasts from Turkish ports like İzmir, Bodrum, and Çanakkale. Notably, some reports highlighted that of 68 boat drivers arrested in 2023, at least 18 hailed from countries like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. Instances like the shipwreck in February 2023, claiming the lives of around 90 individuals, underscore the deadly consequences of these smuggling operations. While many detained boat drivers come from Central Asian republics, they often lack awareness of the law and are exploited by criminal organizations for profit.

Operations to apprehend irregular migrants and migrant smugglers are regularly carried out by Turkish police, gendarmerie, and coast guard teams. Turkish authorities have apprehended 3,158 migrant smugglers thus far in 2024.²⁸

²⁸ IOM, Migrant Presence Monitoring Türkiye, Overview of Migrant Situation, Quarterly Report Q1 – January, February, March 2024, at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/dtm-turkiye-migrant-presence-monitoring-overview-situation-migrants-quarterly-report-q1-january-february-march-2024>.

ANNEX I – Final Programme and Participants

FINAL PROGRAMME

Monday, 20 May: ANKARA

10:00-11:00 Meeting with **Mr. Atilla Toros**, President of Migration Management, **Mr. Huseyin Kök**, Deputy President, and other PMM representatives

12:00-13:00 Meeting with **Rear Admiral Ahmet Kendir**, Turkish Coast Guard Commandant, and **Captain Gökmen Gücüyen**, Head of Intelligence, and other TCGC representatives

14:45-17:30 Joint briefings by government officials

14:45-15:30 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- **Ms. Zeynep Gizem Hançerli**, Head of Migration Department

15:45-17:30 Ministry of Health

- **Doç. Dr. Süleyman Özsarı**, Vice Director of Public Health

- **Ms. Zehra Uzunduran**, Head of Migration Health

Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD)

- **Dr. Sadi Ergin**, Director General for Disaster Response

Ministry of Labor and Social Security

- **Mr. Ali Aybey**, Director General of International Labor Force

- **Mr. Mahir Gümüş**, Vice Director General of International Labor Force

- **Ms. Ecem Aydoğan Akkurteş**, Labor Force Expert

Ministry of Education

- **Mr. Cihan Kıvanç**, Head of Migration and Emergency Education Department

Q&A

Tuesday, 21 May: ADANA

10:15-12:30 Briefing by District Governor of Sarıçam **Mr. Murtaza Dayanç** and Vice-Director of Sarıçam Temporary Accommodation Centre **Mr. Mesut Akhan Erdemir**

Visit to **Adana Sarıçam Temporary Accommodation Centre**

13:00-14:45 Lunch meeting with **Mr. Yavuz Selim Köşger**, Governor of Adana

16:00 Departure to Gaziantep by bus

20:00 Dinner hosted by **Mr. Kemal Çeber**, Governor of Gaziantep

Wednesday, 22 May: GAZIANTEP

08:00-09:00 Meeting with NGO representatives working with Syrian refugees:

- **Mr. Mohammad Alabas**, Country Director, Hand in Hand for Aid and Development (HIHFAD)
- **Ms. Hiba Ezzideen**, CEO, Equity and Empowerment

09:30-12:00 Joint briefing with representatives of relevant institutions and international organizations

09:30-09:50 UNHCR

Mr. Veton Orana, Head of Sub-Office in Gaziantep
Ms. Ezgi Şirin, Assistant Field Officer

09:50-10:10 IOM

Ms. Zülfiye Kazım, Senior Interagency Coordinator
Ms. Francesca Marroni, Project Development & Reporting Officer

10:10-10:30 UNICEF

Ms. Gökçen Yılmaz Tokgöz, Türkiye Programme Specialist

10:30-10:50 WFP

Ms. Asuman Tatal, Gaziantep Regional Manager

11:00-11:20 **Mr. Mehmet Erkoç**, Provincial Director of Migration Management

11:20-11:40 **Amb. Hakki Emre Yunt**, Gaziantep representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Q&A

12:30-14:00 Luncheon hosted by **Ms. Fatma Şahin**, Mayor of Gaziantep

14:15-15:15 Visit to the Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilization (SGDD-ASAM)

Interlocutors:

Mr. Hasan Can Pala, Southeast Regional Manager

Mr. Hüseyin Yılmaz - Field Operations Coordinator

Mr. Ali İhsan Baharoğlu - Gaziantep Provincial Coordinator

Ms. Beyza Nur Azizoğlu - Center Manager

Ms. Mediha Hazal Mansuroğlu - District Attorney

Ms. Ezgi Turgut - Regional Protection Officer

Ms. Yağmur Kübra Subaşı - Regional Coordination Assistant

16:30-18:00 Briefing by **Mr. Mehmet Soydu**, District Governor of İslahiye
Visit to İslahiye 3 Living Space, Gaziantep Province and Değirmencik disaster homes

20:00 Debrief

** END OF THE OFFICIAL PROGRAMME **

OSCE PA Delegation

Members of the Committee

1. Dr. Daniela DE RIDDER (Germany), Chair
2. Mr. Kyriakos HADJIYIANNI (Cyprus), Vice-Chair
3. Ms. Farah KARIMI (The Netherlands), Vice-Chair
4. Dr. Gudrun KUGLER (Austria), Vice-Chair
5. Ms. Canan BAYRAM (Germany)
6. Mr. Kemal ÇELİK (Türkiye)
7. Dr. Kristian KLINCK (Germany)
8. Mr. Dimitrios MARKOPOULOS (Greece)
9. Ms. Özgül SAKI (Türkiye)
10. Mr. David STÖGMÜLLER (Austria)

Staff

11. Ms. Ecem DANIK GOKCE, Secretary of the Delegation of Türkiye to the OSCE PA
12. Ms. Tugce OKUMUS, Secretary of the Delegation of Türkiye to the OSCE PA
13. Mr. Kamil UÇAR, Secretary of the Delegation of Türkiye to the OSCE PA
14. Mr. Yunus YAKUT, Staff of the Delegation of Türkiye to the OSCE PA

OSCE PA International Secretariat

15. Ms. Farimah DAFTARY, Senior Adviser
16. Mr. Mikulas SEMERAK, Research Assistant

ANNEX II – Press Release

Situation of refugees in focus during OSCE PA migration committee visit to Türkiye

GAZIANTEP, 24 May 2024 – Wrapping up a four-day visit to Türkiye, a delegation of ten members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, led by its Chair Dr. Daniela De Ridder (Germany), commended the country for its generosity in welcoming millions of Syrian refugees since 2011. At the same time, it is clear that there are a number of challenges and that Türkiye needs greater support from the international community, the delegation said.

The objective of the visit was to contribute within the OSCE PA to greater understanding of the work being done by Türkiye to support a refugee population of 3.4 million persons, of whom 3.1 million are Syrians under temporary protection. The visit also sought to draw attention to the impact of the February 2023 earthquakes.

Meeting with a wide range of interlocutors, the delegation learned how Türkiye is facilitating the access of Syrians under temporary protection and international protection holders to education, employment, health care, and other services. Challenges such as barriers in accessing legal status and labour permits, the situation of refugees and irregular migrants from other countries, vulnerable refugees – especially women – and addressing child labour and child marriage were among the many issues discussed.

The issue of returns to the so-called ‘safe zone’ in northern Syria and the urgent need for increased humanitarian support to internally displaced persons in Syria to prevent a new wave of refugees were main topics of discussion, with a number of interlocutors underlining that the conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns were not yet present.

The programme kicked off on Monday in Ankara with briefings by representatives of migration management authorities, various Turkish ministries and Türkiye’s Coast Guard Command. The delegation heard about Türkiye’s efforts to step up the fight against irregular migration and save lives, and to counter human trafficking and smuggling. The positive impact of improved co-operation between Greece and Türkiye on reducing irregular migration in the Eastern Mediterranean was also underlined. Conditions and due process in removal centres were debated, with suggestions from the delegation to allow greater oversight by civil society.

“Türkiye has shown remarkable hospitality in welcoming over 3.7 million Syrians and refugees from other countries,” Dr. De Ridder said. “Its comprehensive approach to migration management and high level of co-ordination have enabled it to cope with such huge numbers. Facing a serious economic crisis and the consequences of last year’s earthquakes, Türkiye needs greater support from the international community so that it can develop more flexible, inclusive and durable solutions for the Syrians as well as other persons in need of protection.”

She added that to ensure that the 1.5 million refugee children in particular have a future, it is important for the international community to share responsibility and resettle far greater numbers of vulnerable refugees and to also address the root causes of migration.

The programme continued Tuesday with a visit to Adana Sarıçam Temporary Accommodation Centre, the largest camp in the country, currently hosting about 12,500 Syrians, and which includes schools, health care centres, mosques and other facilities.

The delegation also met with the Governor of Adana and the provincial district governor of Sarıçam.

On Wednesday, the delegation met with provincial authorities and the mayor of Gaziantep as well as representatives of UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and WFP as well as non-governmental organizations. It visited a container camp set up for Syrian earthquake victims in İslahiye and new housing units for the affected population of the region. The earthquake hit the areas in the southeast near the Syrian border hosting a large refugee community as well as northern Syria. Nearly 54,000 people were killed in Türkiye; a further 107,000 were injured.

“Türkiye has done its best to welcome millions of refugees but it has now reached its capacity,” Committee Member Kemal Çelik (Türkiye) stated. “The pandemic and then the February 2023 earthquakes have further added to the challenges. We need Europe to show more solidarity and to share the responsibility.”

Özgül Saki (Türkiye) also stressed the need to pay more attention to the situation of women and girl refugees and migrants, in removal centres in particular, with a focus on preventing discrimination and harassment in the labour market and addressing gender based violence.

In addition to De Ridder, Çelik and Saki, the delegation included the following OSCE parliamentarians: Committee Vice-Chairs Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus), Farah Karimi (Netherlands), Gudrun Kugler (Austria), and Members Canan Bayram (Germany), Kristian Klinck (Germany), Dimitrios Markopoulos (Greece), and David Stögmüller (Austria). This week’s trip follows a previous [visit of the committee to Türkiye](#) in May 2017. It was also intended as a follow-up to the [field visit to Greece in March 2022](#). The committee [also travelled to Lampedusa](#), Italy, in March 2024.