

# Situational Briefing

## Ankara | October-November 2020

### Recommendations

1. The Government of Turkey must speed up financial support to refugee families who have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; this needs to be equally addressed for the host communities and refugees alike if we are not to witness one of the worst poverty crisis in the last decade.
2. Local authorities must immediately allocate more human resources to cope with the increased requests for Temporary Protection Identification Documents to ensure all refugees have access to health care, education and any other protection services available.
3. More than **4 million** people are at an even greater health risk than before this earthquake. Shelter, medical care as COVID-19 is wreaking havoc globally against everyone, and support for refugees facing another winter without proper accommodation, must be immediately provided to all displaced as a result of this disaster.

### Refugee Overview in Turkey

Turkey hosts around **5 million** refugees. Most of them – **98%** precisely - are located in urban areas, while the rest live in the camps. According to the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) figures, Ankara where IGAM operates, there are **98,889** registered Syrian refugees (Nov 2020) and **90,228** people with residence permit. We also believe there are around **20-30,000** unregistered refugees in Ankara, majority of whom are Afghans. Yet the real numbers remain unknown.

### Recent Developments

#### I. Scarce access to basic services for refugees due to COVID-19 impacts

In an environment of rapidly increasing numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Turkey,<sup>1</sup> currently at **558,517** confirmed cases<sup>2</sup>, an unknown number of them are affecting refugees with already preexisting vulnerabilities and higher risks to the virus.<sup>3</sup> Turkey, which hosts the largest population of Syrian Refugees estimated at **3.6 million** registered, is expected to maintain its number until the end of the year.<sup>4</sup> As the Turkish government again tightened precautions to contain the virus, this raises specific concerns for the refugee population whose unemployment rates reached alarming levels: only **6.4%** of those supported by the Research Centre on Asylum and Migration (IGAM) are still working while **46%** lost their jobs and the remaining refugees were unemployed before the pandemic hit.<sup>5</sup> Many others are unable to have their temporary protection cards issued due to administrative delays or simply fear of not being returned back to Syria.

Since Syrians' legal status in Turkey was systematised in 2014 with the establishment and application of the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, they are dependent on obtaining this identification (ID). It, however, only applies to those registered while the many others who remain outside the system, also need to seek alternative options. This temporary protection ID card provides free education and health care as well as the right to legal work to all Syrian nationals who registered. It has remained the backbone of Turkey's refugee response over the past six years.

Due to COVID-19, however, registered refugees report having had difficulties securing an appointment from Ankara Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM). Aid organisations like IGAM are working with those in need to secure these appointments for them but COVID-19 has made it impossible as local authorities are over-stretched to respond to all requests. Therefore, ID processes of refugees are delayed and refugees remain without access to any service or possibility to secure their IDs. Application for new ID registration for those who do not have ID cannot be made or transferred to Ankara because local authorities are aiming to minimize movements of refugees to the metropolitan areas.

Refugees are also unable to initiate processes for ID verification, ID transferring and new address registry. These issues aggravate their vulnerabilities and protection risks as refugees are not able to apply social assistance, benefits from governmental services such as hospitals and schools. Even when they do, getting the medical care they need is another obstacle they face as the health services are over-stretched fighting the current pandemic.

As a consequence, the number of people requesting support to IGAM for basic needs has increased in the past months. For example, in the month of October 2020, **75%** of the new beneficiaries requested support for basic needs only. Having information about health and educational issues is of second priority and need amongst the refugee population as they fear not being able to seek or receive treatment. Additionally, IGAM's refugee beneficiaries approach us for a wide range of legal issues such as obtaining new ID registration, ID transferring, ID verification, divorce process, marriage documentation, resettlement to a third country, or simply wanting to obtain Turkish citizenship. In October, **26%** of IGAM's new beneficiaries requested legal support from the IGAM Info Hub. Beneficiaries are informed regarding issues and referred to relevant institutions. So far, IGAM has provided this type of support to almost **30%** of the total number of refugees served in the months of October and November 2020.

<sup>1</sup> <https://covid19.saglik.gov.tr/> Ministry of Health

<sup>2</sup> <https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/tr> Number of confirmed cases by WHO reported cases is much higher

<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 barriers and response strategies for refugees and undocumented migrants in Turkey - ScienceDirect

<sup>4</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/dursol\\_oct.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/dursol_oct.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> according to IGAM's last needs assessment (March to mid-June 2020)

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### 2. Natural disaster adds another insecurity layer for refugees in Izmir

The earthquake of 6.8 magnitude that took place in Izmir on 30 October, which hit Turkish coast and the Greek island of Samos, added another layer of risks to those seeking refuge in Turkey. Turkey's western Izmir province was most affected resulting in the deaths of **115** people and **1,034** people were injured as estimated by the Ministry of Health. Izmir is the third largest city in Turkey currently hosting **4.3 million** residents and **150,000** registered refugees<sup>6</sup>. **Half** of the registered refugees are children<sup>7</sup>. Many more are unseen and unaccounted as they remain unregistered. For them, access to any type of service is almost impossible. Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, Izmir has been the hub for refugees to cross to Greece islands searching for safety and a better life.

In November, the earthquake meant for at least **200** Syrian families that they had to move again as they lost their homes. Almost **a hundred** of them found shelter in the tent sites set up by the local authorities while still an estimated number of **50** families stay in the backyards of their damaged houses. Some other refugee families prefer to stay in the already narrow, crowded homes with their relatives and friends. As winter season is approaching, they need to be in adequate accommodation and have the necessary house items to ensure they survive the winter in decent conditions.

### IGAM Response

In response to the complex environment that has aggravated everyone's needs, especially those seeking refuge in Turkey, The Research Center on Asylum and Migration (IGAM) has supported more than **500** refugees with preventative and remedial interventions, including individual protection assistance. This has helped the refugee communities to get the help they need as the whole national support systems were struggling to cope with containing the pandemic.

Awareness raising sessions and Psychosocial Support (PSS) activities with children were not conducted due to COVID-19. Yet, we have been delivering online awareness raising sessions to the refugee community. To maintain contact with our beneficiaries, IGAM has set up a YouTube channel to ensure refugees remain connected and up to date with the information provided. Different programmes, activities and announcements were produced in this channel. Additionally, IGAM sent text messages (SMS) to beneficiaries regarding announcements about COVID-19, new updates, changing working hours and any other information of interest. This October, two different text messages were sent via phone to more than **1,600** beneficiaries. One of them included information about the Hayat Eve Sığar (HES - Life at Home) application and the other one included information about The UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) scholarship opportunities for university students who have the status of international protection or office applications. The HES application is a mandatory application intended for use of people by the Ministry of Health in Turkey. During controlled social life conditions, HES application helps people's safely share their COVID-19 risk status with institutions and individuals for activities like transportation or visits.

More information campaigns and innovative channels of communication are needed and key to ensuring continuous outreach to the most vulnerable whom we serve. To this end, support for international and local aid agencies is critical at this stage to ensure no one is left behind and assisted.

### Humanitarian Concerns

1. Registered refugees are not able to guarantee their temporary protection IDs, which leaves them outside any basic care services according to their legal rights; the remaining others, who are not registered, are obliged to find alternatives if they do not want to risk being deported.
2. The registered Syrian and non-Syrian refugee population has been largely dependent on daily wages and other types of informal employment; COVID-19 restrictive measures have severely impacted their livelihoods pushing them into poverty. More than **%50** of IGAM's beneficiaries live under the poverty line and risk to fall into deeper vulnerabilities.<sup>8</sup>
3. More than **4 million** people are at an even greater health risk than before this earthquake and Izmir is one of the metropolitan areas with large population of refugees, Syrian and of other nationalities. For them, this natural disaster put them on the move, once again, without proper shelter conditions and with less capacity for self-reliance.

<sup>6</sup> official number of refugees under the Temporary Protection system

<sup>7</sup> 46% ibid 6

<sup>8</sup> These estimations are made according to interviews and protection risk analysis by IGAM staff



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## About IGAM

The Research Center on Asylum and Migration (İltica ve Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi (IGAM)) is a young, dynamic non-governmental organisation founded in 2013 in Ankara. IGAM provides information and protection support to refugees by ensuring full access to their rights under Law on Foreigners and International Protection. IGAM operates in Keçiören district of Ankara under the project titled 'Providing Information and Protection Assistance to Vulnerable Refugees in Turkey and Enhancing Community-based Protection', which is funded by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) in partnership with World Vision International.

## About World Vision

World Vision is a humanitarian and development organisation dedicated to working with children, families and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. We serve all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

The World Vision Syria Response, based out of Amman, covers programmes in Syria, Jordan and Turkey. We also have national offices in Lebanon and Iraq, responding to both domestic development/humanitarian needs and the Syrian refugee crisis. Since 2013, the Syria Response has been at the leading edge of World Vision's work in fragile contexts, delivering innovative and evidence-based programming across three diverse countries. Directly and through partners, we support protection, health, education, livelihoods, water & sanitation, and food security projects to vulnerable families. Our approach focuses on the holistic needs of the child, embedded within their community structures.



“ I got an appointment to receive my identity with the help of IGAM. Now, my family and I can benefit from various services in Ankara, thank you so much. God bless you. ”

- Muhammed\*, 31

\*Name has been changed to protect identity.

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