

Situational Briefing

“COVID-19 AND ACCESS TO VACCINE”

OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 27 April 2021, there have been **14.539.302 confirmed cases of COVID-19** globally, including **3.116.444 deaths**, reported. As of 11 April 2021, a total of **961.231.417 vaccine doses** have also been administered across the world.¹

In Turkey, from 3 January 2020 to 27 April 2021, there have been **4.667.281 confirmed cases of COVID-19** with **38.711 deaths**.²

Vaccination started on January 14, 2021 following a four-stage plan designed by the government. Vaccination stages are as follows³:

Stage 1: Health personnel and persons above 65 years old

Stage 2: Essential front-line workers and persons between ages 50 and 64

Stage 3: Persons below 50 years old with at least one chronic disease and young adults

Stage 4: The rest of the public

Since 14 January 2021, **21.4 million** doses of vaccine have been administered in the country. Of all the doses, 13.29 million people received the first dose and 8.11 million received both doses.⁴

The Turkish Government plans to vaccinate 60% of its population (of 83 millions Turkish people and of 4.5 million others) by the end of May 2021. This targeted population corresponds to **52.5 million Turkish citizens along with 800.000 people of other nationalities**. Stage 1 is now complete; meaning that, all the health personnel and persons above 65 years old are vaccinated. Stage 2 is in progress. It is reported that 1.2 million school staff were vaccinated before the reopening of schools last March 2021⁵.

CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING THE COVID-19 VACCINE

In Turkey, foreign persons can obtain different types of identification cards (IDs) depending on their status of entry: **Temporary Protection ID, International Protection ID or Residence Permit**. Registered refugees can apply to and obtain one of the aforementioned documents according to certain conditions, such as nationality, country of origin, the reason for leaving the home country (war, fear of prosecution, education, health, work, etc.), or protection risks and vulnerabilities.

¹ <https://covid19.who.int/>

² https://covid19.saglik.gov.tr/?_Dil=2

³ <https://covid19asi.saglik.gov.tr/EN-78317/turkish-national-covid-19-vaccine-administration-strategy.html>

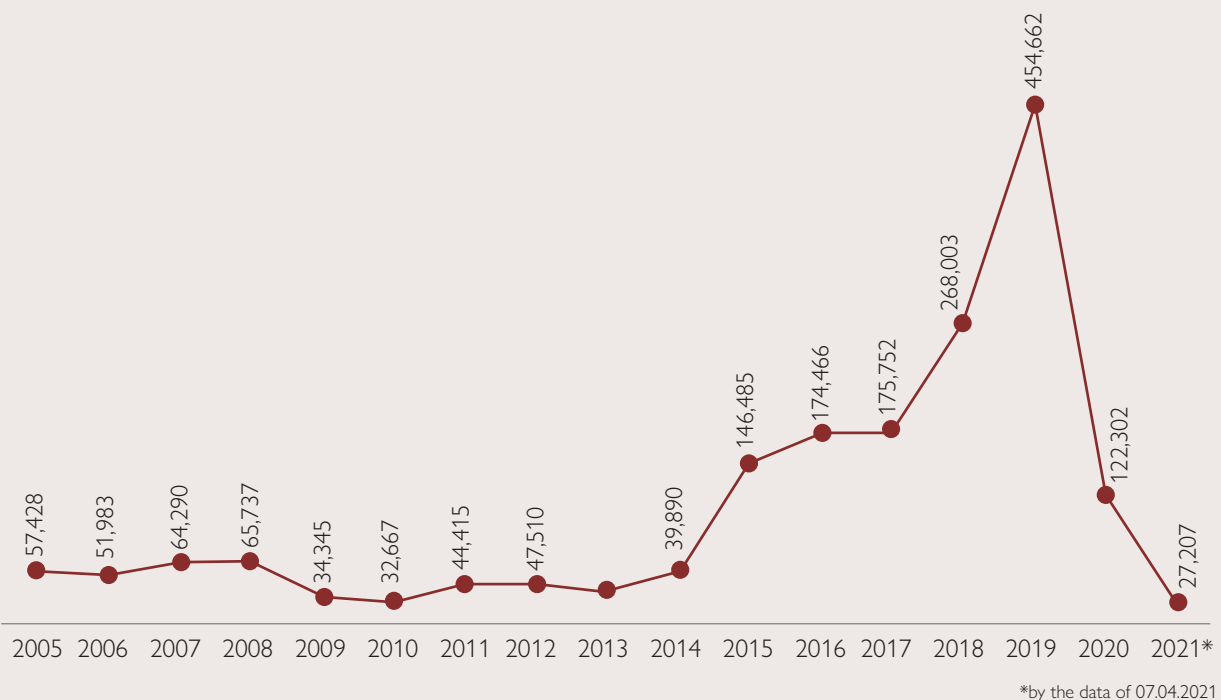
⁴ https://covid19asi.saglik.gov.tr/?_Dil=2

⁵ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/turkey-education-workers-start-getting-vaccine-jabs/2155291>

Each type of ID grants the holder with different rights and obligations. For instance, general health insurance is valid for all persons who have Temporary Protection. On the other hand, those holding an International Protection (IP), have health insurance valid for only one year. After one year, and in case of existence of special needs such as financial challenges and special circumstances, Turkish authorities might grant IP-applicants/holders general health insurance. This can only be activated by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) after the holder has provided the necessary valid documentation (health report, proof of protection risk). Those who hold a Residence Permit, for example, need to have private health insurance to benefit from health services. While registered refugees do have access to health care services, **unregistered refugees do not benefit from any public service, including health care.** The only exception are the Migrant Health Centres (MHCs), operating under the “SIHHAT” Project funded by ECHO, where refugees can access basic health services unconditionally of their legal status. There are currently 177 MHCs in 29 cities across the country. However, these centres are limited by number, capacity and coverage of services. Currently, these centres provide for primary care, vaccination of newborns, cancer screening, reproductive health services, as well as pre and post natal care for mothers and babies, and mental health and psychosocial support⁶. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 vaccination is also not covered.

This leaves the unregistered refugees in an impossible situation with no access to basic health care, including for the COVID-19 vaccine. As it is impossible to determine the total number of this population, the real needs are also hard to estimate to ensure the virus is not spread. While the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) “captured irregular migrants” in their statistics, the estimate number is at hundred thousands, as per the figure below, but the real numbers are much higher⁷.

THE NUMBER OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS WHO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY YEARS



Both the Keçiören District Health Governorate, the Immunization Unit and the World Health Organisation (WHO) Refugee Health Program Representatives, have confirmed that the COVID-19 vaccine process in Turkey is based on needs and not status or the nationality of patients. Yet, **only refugees who have a valid ID and live in their city of registration can take an appointment and be vaccinated**, as long as they are eligible according to the Vaccination Stages in Turkey mentioned above. The unregistered refugees and those who live in another city rather than their registration city, cannot be vaccinated under the current legal scheme. **Only 4.558 Syrians have been vaccinated to date, according to WHO.**

⁶ <http://www.sihhatproject.org/faaliyetler.html>

⁷ <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>



RECOMMENDATIONS

COVID-19 is undoubtedly a global health emergency, which warrants broad and urgent responses. However, human rights and public health should not be seen simply as competing public policy objectives, with a compromise on one side needed to attain the other.

1. **The Government of Turkey** must provide vaccination to all refugees, regardless of their documentation and status. We urge the authorities to **prioritise protecting the most vulnerable people in the society through transparent policymaking and public participation to ensure that public health measures employ a rights-based approach to health.** Considering the severity of this situation, no group of persons should be left out of public health services. Inequitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatment mirrors wider health-care inequities, and is grounded in broader structural inequalities. This puts some populations at greater risk than others. Since COVID-19 pandemic concerns public health, the inability of unregistered refugees to be vaccinated threatens public health. To this end, the government must provide vaccination to all refugees, regardless of their documentation and status.
2. The Government of Turkey must increase resources to set up more Migrant Health Centres where health services are provided to refugees based on needs and not status, especially to ensure the unregistered refugees receive the COVID-19 vaccination. This will also contribute for public hospitals and other health centres to not be over-crowded during the pandemic. To this end,
 - the MHCs staff can count and identify the unregistered refugees using the phone number and address information as a means of verification.
3. Humanitarian actors must continue to advocate for the unregistered refugees' access to COVID-19 vaccine in the local coordination meetings, and UN Working Groups and in high-level advocacy meetings with the Government of Turkey.

ABOUT IGAM

The Research Centre on Asylum and Migration (İltica ve Göç Araştırma 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 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.



World Vision Syria Response 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 office 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.

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Visit IGAM's ECHO Project Webpage:
<https://igamder.org/TR>



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