



POLICY BRIEF

Key Challenges Facing Refugees
in
Istanbul & Recommendations



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About IBC

International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC) Refugee Consultation and Psychosocial Support Hubs are operating in Bursa, Istanbul (Esenyurt and Sancaktepe) and Konya under the project of Providing Information and Protection Assistance to Vulnerable Refugees in Turkey and Enhancing Community-based Protection, funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO).

Introduction

According to UNHCR, as of 30th July 2019, there are around 4 million refugees in Turkey including Syrians, Afghanis, Iraqis, Iranians and others nationalities (UNHCR Turkey Fact Sheet, July, 2019). As per the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) November 2019 figures, Istanbul has the largest number: 552,080 refugees, representing 3.65% of the province's 2019 population. There are 176,758 refugees in Bursa and 110,051 refugees in Konya from different nationalities.

International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation has been registered and actively operating as an Istanbul based Turkish NGO since 2000. With support from the European Union, IBC provides information and protection support in order for refugees to access their rights based on the Foreigners and International Protection Law. Under this project, IBC operates in Istanbul Sancaktepe, Esenyurt, Bursa and Konya. The project aims to enhance refugees' to access services, provision of appropriate information on rights and obligations, and support for refugees through activities such as raising awareness on various issues. In addition, it provides legal and psychosocial counselling services.

Since 2018, it has been observed through IBC's case management officers and in numerous focus group discussions and awareness raising sessions that refugees are facing a range of challenges. The root causes of some of the main issues are the language barrier and inadequate knowledge on rights and obligations under Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Similar problems have also been raised by mukhtars, municipalities, officials from provincial directorates of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, Sub-Governorships and I/NGOs during coordination meetings.

Key Challenges Facing Refugees

Issue 1: Temporary Protection Identification (TPID)

Challenges relating to Temporary Protection Identification (TPID) has been observed by IBC in all of its four locations. The most common problem that beneficiaries approach IBC with are related to their TPIDs (registration, verification, cancellation, transfer and the inability to register themselves or their children). The consequences of not having a valid TPID including being unable to access the most basic services provided by the state - health services, education, legal support, and most vitally financial aid, the Emergency Social Safety Net Program (ESSN).

IBC has continued to receive enquiries regarding TPID and despite the many administrative challenges and legal issues some beneficiaries have, TPID remains the most persistent matter.

Registration: One major challenge that Syrians face revolves around the unawareness and lack of information on the importance of registration under the temporary protection system and about the rights that TPID gives. As a result, they encounter difficulties (and do not know how to overcome them) while trying to access education, health, legal and other services. Refugees are often not aware that if they are not registered under the temporary protection system, they will not be able to receive any governmental services.

Verification: Most Syrian refugees have to update their TPIDs depending on changes in their personal situations such as marriage, divorce, moving from one province to another, death or birth etc. However, they often lack the required information regarding the process and regulations and on their rights and obligations. DGMM does not accept verbal applications for the renewal of TPID and they request official documents such as Family booklets, Birth Certificates, etc. which can be a challenge to obtain, particularly if refugees lost or left such documents when they fled their home countries. Most beneficiaries' information recorded in the DGMM is incorrect. For instance, some of the applicants who have never attended school appear to be university graduates in their TPIDs. Info Hubs identified that there was an increase of cases stating that DGMM does not let applicants into their offices if they do not have TPIDs or they reside in other provinces rather than those they are registered in.

Deportations: It is also worth mentioning that, on 27.07.2019 Syrian refugees under the status of Temporary Protection who were residing in Istanbul but registered in different provinces, or never registered under any status, were required by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management to either to register in different provinces, move to their registered provinces or to transfer their registration to Istanbul if permitted, with a deadline of end of October 2019. Thousands of people were detained and relocated as a result of this announcement.

Third Country Resettlement: Another common request among the Syrians in Turkey is to be resettled to a third country. When they go to obtain information regarding the resettlement process from the PDMM, many refugees face maltreatment by the staff or refusal to provide support, leading to a problematic lack of information regarding the resettlement of refugees to a third country. This has led to a spread of rumours and misinformation, and some refugees have been cheated out of money or made false promises.

Birth Registration: Children who are born in Turkey under the temporary protection status, the international protection status, or not registered at all under any status, are at risk of being stateless as Turkish Nationality law requires at least one of the parents to be a Turkish citizen in order for the child to acquire the Turkish citizenship. Since, individuals do not have the right to the Turkish citizenship upon their birth in Turkey, it is important for the parents to go to the Civil Registry for the registration of birth and acquiring a birth certificate, then to register this birth in the Syrian civil registry in order for the child to get the Syrian nationality. In order to do that, they must go to the Syrian consulate in Istanbul - requiring a large amount of money to pay for consulate fees, translation, taxes, etc. This can be a challenge for refugees and an impossible financial burden. In summary, it is important for refugees to receive the birth certificate from Turkish civil registry in order to avoid the potential statelessness in the future.

Issue 2: Language barrier

The majority of refugees had zero or very limited knowledge of Turkish before they came to the country. Language barrier is the most common problem that refugees face when trying to access education, healthcare, labor market etc. The language barrier continues to be a hindrance in accessing government services and has deterred many refugees from attempting to seek the services, which are usually conducted entirely in Turkish.

In addition, timely availability of translators at state hospitals is a significant issue, leading to delayed appointments and communication barriers during doctor's examinations. This has resulted to engaging patients' children as translators during hospital visits. This is a particular challenge for female refugees, who are not always able to express themselves at the gynecologist when communicating through their children or a male translator.

Issue 3: Peer Bullying

Through house visitations, in-depth interviews and Individual Protection Assistance, case management and awareness raising sessions, IBC has learned that most Syrian children experience stigma and discrimination.

Bullying and abuse of refugee children by classmates and peers, both in school and in neighborhoods, has been observed in all four of IBC's project locations. Many children tend to drop out of school due to this situation, leading to major integration problems. During awareness raising sessions, many of the beneficiaries talked openly about the difficulties their children were facing and raised their concerns. They especially want teachers in schools to be aware of this issue.

Recommendations and Policy Proposals

Recommendation 1:

The main challenges facing refugees are clear from IBC's work and assessments: lack of information, inconsistent implementation of regulations and policies, restrictions to movement, access to services, as well as lack of durable solutions, including TPID.

As IBC, conducting awareness raising to inform refugees of their rights and basic services regarding TPID has been proven to be a valuable and cost-effective service.

In addition, capacity-building of PDMM in terms of increasing staff numbers, legal knowledge, and Arabic speaking personnel will contribute to creating more durable solutions.

It is also recommended to inform families about the importance of properly registering births in order to avoid children from becoming stateless, and for there to be financial support provided to refugees who are unable to cover the costs of registration.

Recommendation 2:

Increased xenophobia between refugees and local residents has resulted in the adoption of negative coping mechanisms which have posed challenges to social cohesion in communities. Supporting refugees to learn Turkish will have benefits for community harmony and interaction, as well as refugee participation in the labor market and access to services.

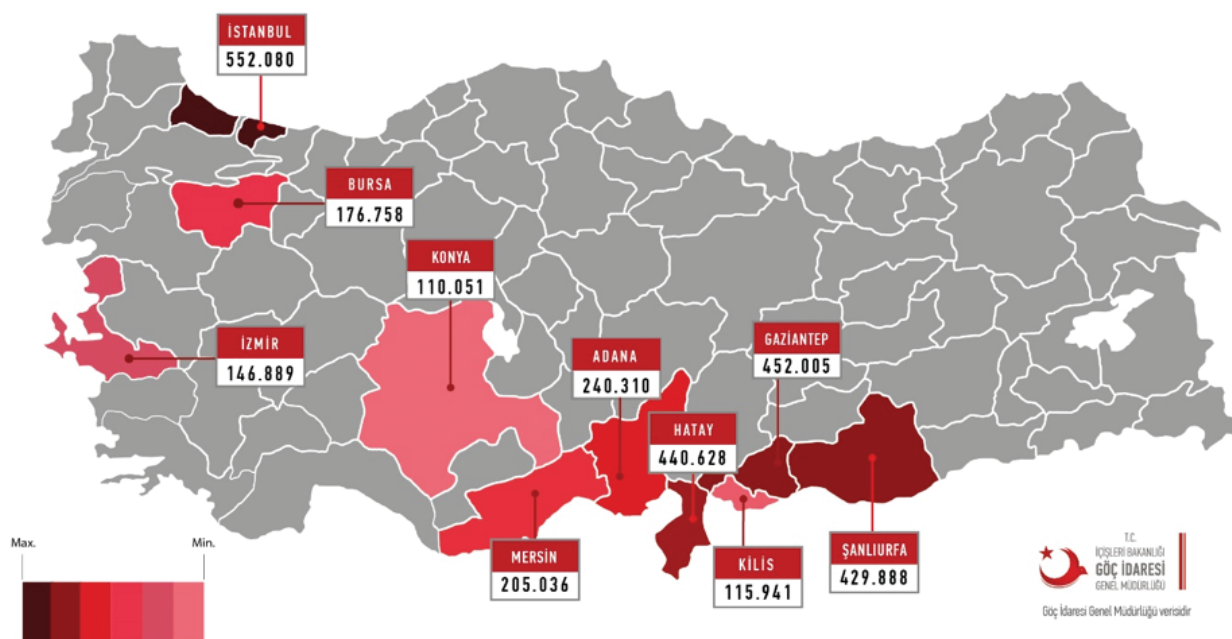
In addition, as a community-based protection approach, for mitigating protection risks and supporting resilience-building and social cohesion among refugees and local communities, the number of translators in hospitals should be increased and the appointment system could be offered in Arabic. Governmental institutions may consider hiring bilingual staff to respond in both languages Turkish and Arabic.

Recommendation 3:

Peer bullying is one factor which causes refugee children to not attend schools, affecting not just their basic right to education but their integration into Turkish society and language and prospects for the future.

In order to find a solution to the peer bullying problem, it has been determined that awareness raising sessions should be held - particularly in schools, with collaboration of school principals and teachers. It is also recommended that refugee and local families participate in awareness rising sessions which are conducted by NGOs or government actors. This should include psychosocial support for children affected by peer bullying. The Ministry of National Education is encouraged to provide more capacity trainings for teachers on dealing with refugee children, children at risk, and children with special needs. They are also encouraged to collaborate with specialized service providers working in NGOs.

The Distribution of Syrians under Temporary Protection - Top 10 Provinces.



About the Project

Overview: Providing information and protection assistance to vulnerable refugees in Turkey and enhancing community-based protection.

Donors and Partners: The project is being financed by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). The project has two implementing partners: International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC) and The Research Centre on Asylum and Migration (IGAM)

Geographic Scope of The Project: Bursa, Istanbul (Esenyurt, Sancaktepe) and Konya IBC.

Project Goal: Ensure that vulnerable refugees in Turkey are protected from harm, until lasting solutions are modelled and integrated into government systems — resulting in sustainable and equitable access to services for refugees.

Project Scope and Activities: Activities under this project started in August 2018. IBC's Info Hubs provide consultation, support and referral services to all refugees. Apart from 1-1 in depth interviews with case workers, PSS and legal counsels, awareness raising sessions are also being conducted. IBC's services cover education, health, occupation, psychosocial wellbeing and legal fields. Information, consultation, support and referral mechanisms are in place in order to cover these areas. The topics of awareness raising sessions include but are not limited to child labor, early forced marriage, social aids, accessing services (education, health, occupation etc.), health insurance, information on IDs, work permits, rights and obligations, importance of psychosocial support, gender-based violence, peer bullying, good parenting, İŞKUR (Turkish Labor Agency), and current updates on laws and regulations.

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References/More Information

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