



**Initial Assessment of the Current Situation of Afghan Refugees in Turkey**  
**International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation**  
**18.08.2021**

**Background**

Turkey has been one of the world's largest refugee-hosting countries in the last decade. After the Syrian crisis in 2011, Syrian refugees were seeking refuge in Turkey and have passed the borders to have temporary protection status. According to the latest statistics, there are approximately 3.700.000 million of Syrians registered in Turkey under Temporary Protection (TP).<sup>1</sup> However, the situation of the Afghan people is different. Since the 1970s, Afghan people have sought refuge in different countries, especially neighbour countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey.

It has been known that Afghan people have been forced to displace within and from the country and according to the UNHCR, Afghan refugees represent the longest-standing displaced persons in the world. The conflicts and poverty in Afghanistan produce refugees and their migration flows are also exploited by human trafficking.

For the last five-ten years, Turkey is the first address where Afghan refugees will either stay in the country permanently or wait at a transit point to cross to third country. Despite statistical uncertainty, according to the latest data of UNHCR<sup>2</sup>, "116.403 Afghan asylum seekers and 980 Afghan refugees are residing in Turkey."<sup>2</sup> Roughly 4.400 Afghans in an irregular situation were arrested by Turkish authorities in January-February 2021.<sup>3</sup> 6.000 Afghans were deported from Turkey to Afghanistan from January to December 2020.<sup>3</sup> "This data makes them the second larger refugee group in the country just after Syrian refugees. Afghan refugees are generally considered to be "irregular migrants" since they crossed borders without official documents.

Aksaray, Konya, Nevşehir, Trabzon, Tokat, Çankırı, Kayseri, Erzurum, Van and Istanbul are considered as main provinces where Afghan refugees settle. According to the field reports of Afghan association (ARSA) in Kayseri, numbers of Afghan refugees benefitting from International Protection are as follow: 5700 in Kayseri, 8846 in Konya, 8756 in Nevşehir, 5890 in Karaman. In other words, especially Marmara Region (Istanbul), Central Anatolian provinces, Van as the main border city, and some Black Sea provinces close to Central Anatolia or Van are the places with the highest Afghan population.

**Methodology**

Since current migration flow of Afghan refugees flee from Taliban by passing Iranian borders to arrive Turkey becomes a very significant issue in the last months, IBC took action to conduct an initial assessment to understand the situation and what can be done as potential intervention.

The first-hand observations and feedbacks from IBC Esenyurt InfoHub (an Istanbul district, disadvantageous area, populated with vulnerable host and refugee communities members) and the results from expert interview with manager of Afghan Refugee Solidarity Association (ARSA, also a partner of IBC from Turkey Refugee Council) in Kayseri (a metropolitan city in Central Anatolia) enlighten the current situation of Afghan migration flow.

While the initial assessment results taken from ARSA interview include information about Afghan refugees in Kayseri having International Protection, the initial assessment results taken from IBC

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> , accessed on 13.07.2021

<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> Source: UNHCR Refugee Statistics (2020) <sup>3</sup> Source: Republic of Turkey – Directorate General of Migration Management, Irregular Migration <sup>4</sup> Source: OCHA, Afghanistan Snapshot of Population Movements (January-December 2020)

<sup>3</sup> For more information: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Statistical%20Fact%20sheet%20-%20Onward%20movements%20of%20Afghan%20refugees%20January%20-%20February%202021.pdf>



**Initial Assessment of the Current Situation of Afghan Refugees in Turkey  
International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation  
18.08.2021**

Esenyurt InfoHub include mostly information about unregistered Afghan refugees in Istanbul having no official IP status yet.

Before any survey that will be realized in the upcoming periods, these initial insights aim to explain the current migration flow of Afghan refugees and life conditions of already settled Afghan refugees under International Protection.

Assessed results are already similar to the UNHCR's third-round of the protection sector inter-agency needs assessment results, carried out in January 2021.<sup>4</sup> IBC was one of the partners of these inter-agency need assessments, and Afghan refugees were second group of the sample size. IBC's own initial assessment has been done in the first week of August 2021. The assessment analysis aims to understand the main challenges faced by Afghan refugees in both cities, Kayseri and Istanbul. These two cities represent a good sample: Istanbul, as one of the main focal places of Syrian and non-Syrian refugees address, already hosts many registered and unregistered refugees. Kayseri, as one of the metropolitan cities in Central Anatolia represents general situation of non-Syrian refugees (especially Afghans) settle in and around.

***Initial Assessment Questionnaire***

**Official registration to Migration Management**

- Are there any exact information/number of Afghan refugees in Kayseri and in Istanbul?

There are no exact numbers of registered or unregistered Afghan refugees in Kayseri and in Esenyurt, however, it is estimated that there are approximately 5000 people in both places.

- What are the main documents to be registered by DGMM?

Kayseri and Esenyurt fields stated that Afghanistan ID cards, marriage document, passport, or rent agreement are the main necessary documents requested from registration offices.

- How long does it take for an Afghan refugee to be registered in Turkey?

Both fields stated that it depends on the city, but, seems like a month at least.

- How application to IP status proceeds for Afghan refugees?

Kayseri field stated that nearly 95% of new applications are rejected by PDMM offices; Esenyurt field stated that new applications are not accepted by Istanbul PDMM offices and cases are referred to other cities.

- What are the main barriers during registration process?

Single men's registration applications are generally rejected. Also, lack of identity cards/acceptable documents and proofs and arrest history are the reasons that effect rejection.

- How unaccompanied children are registered to Migration Management?

After unaccompanied refugees are arrested or referred for registration, they are sent to the local offices of Ministry of Family Affairs. The child must be kept there. Since there is no interpreter here for these

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<sup>4</sup> For more detail please see: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86731>



**Initial Assessment of the Current Situation of Afghan Refugees in Turkey  
International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation  
18.08.2021**

children, most of them cannot resist and run away. If a child can live in this area until the age of 18, they will be provided with asylum documents and be released from orphanage. The newly detained children on the way are transferred to deportation centers and deported before their age is determined.

- Which factors best facilitate the inclusion of refugees into access to government registration process?

First country identity cards, passports, marriage documents, family reunification (or arrive as a family), health reports from Turkish hospitals can facilitate the process. No fingerprints given before is also a must.

- How rejection cases are ended?

Asylum seekers make an interview at PDMM offices. Those who cannot pass the interview (meaning, those who cannot obtain residence permit) must leave the country within 30 days.

Access to the health services

- How registered Afghan refugees benefit from general health insurance?

Kayseri field explained that once the case is registered, family members will have the one-year insurance and can use public health services in the State hospitals. Both fields also added that refugees under 18 and above 60 can benefit from general health insurance even they are unregistered. However, those whose ID cards are expired or having no ID card at all, cannot benefit health services, therefore, they cannot get vaccinated for Coronavirus. This increases public health risks. Kayseri field summarized the situation: asylum seekers' health insurance was active until 2013. These insurances were deactivated for non-Syrian asylum seekers and were reactivated again in 2018 without any restrictions. At the beginning of 2020, an age limit was set for non-Syrian asylum seeker. For example, unregistered refugees between the ages of 19 and 59 cannot use public health insurance.

- How disabled refugees can benefit from health services?

Disabled refugee must have health reports from a public hospital to show the disability percentage. In accordance with this, she/he will have public health services, otherwise not.

- How a woman refugee expecting child can benefit from health services?

Pregnant women with a refugee residence permit have health insurance for up to one month after birth. Pregnant women whose asylum cases are rejected do not have health insurance.

Access to the education

- How Afghan children enrol to school?

Kayseri field answered that documents from the first country or any country where refugee already has been living there before are necessary to be enrol to the school. However, language barrier, age of child, administrative bureaucracy in schools, address registration problem, school principals' oppositions, parents' attitude against refugee students, and poor integration are the main issues faced by Afghan families and their children.

- What are the main challenges of access to the education?

Afghan families' economic situation, registration problem, lack of sufficient information and knowledge about Turkish education system are the main challenges.



**Initial Assessment of the Current Situation of Afghan Refugees in Turkey**  
**International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation**  
**18.08.2021**

Main challenges

- What is the most significant problem faced by Afghan refugees?

Language barrier is defined the most significant problem by both fields according to collected feedbacks. The lack of information in Afghan languages (Persian, Pashtun, or other dialects), the lack of translator in public institutions increase the need of spreading information in non-Arabic languages for refugee groups other than Syrians.

- Can registered Afghan refugees have same rights and services as Syrian refugees have?

Yes. Education, health service, transportation, registration for aid service, E-devlet, and legal aid services are the services that they can benefit once they are registered.

- What type of legal assistance can be provided for Afghan refugees?

Legal service for protesting against PDMM rejected cases can be provided by legal consultants.

Everyday life

- Do Afghan refugees have access to non-formal education programs such as vocational training, life skills courses, learning/recreational centres, etc...?

Occasionally, there are trainings and vocational courses, however these are not carried out professionally, therefore, no attention is paid to its implementation. Refugees do not continue until the end of the program. Plus, some of the programs are only for Syrians and local people.

- How vulnerable Afghan refugees can be supported?

There is little interest shown to Afghan refugees' problems. However, guidance, legal assistance, protection for single women and children, and translation support in relevant institutions can be first actions.

***Main Findings and First Results***

Up-to-date statistics on irregular migration and international protection status taken from official website of DGMM are given below.<sup>5</sup> As seen, people from Afghanistan are the main group among other refugees from out-of-Syria countries:

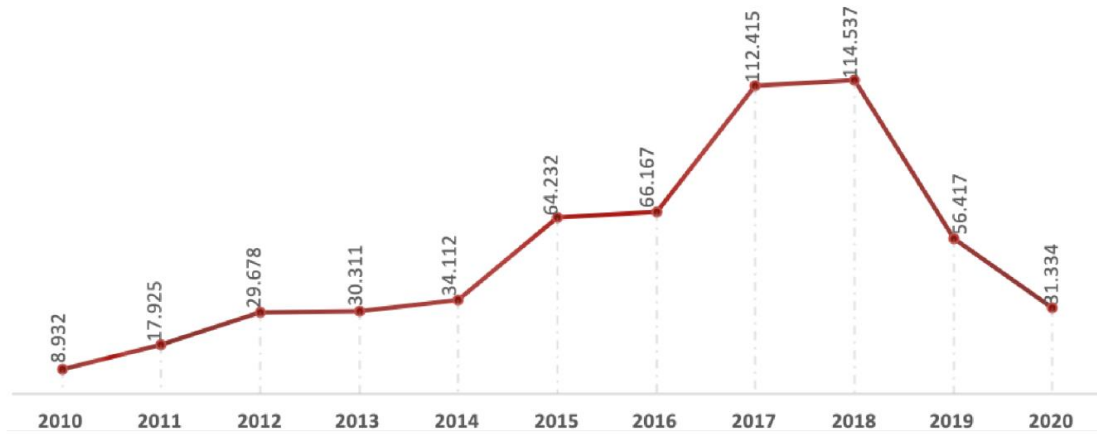
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<sup>5</sup> <https://en.goc.gov.tr/international-protection17> , accessed on 13.07.2021.

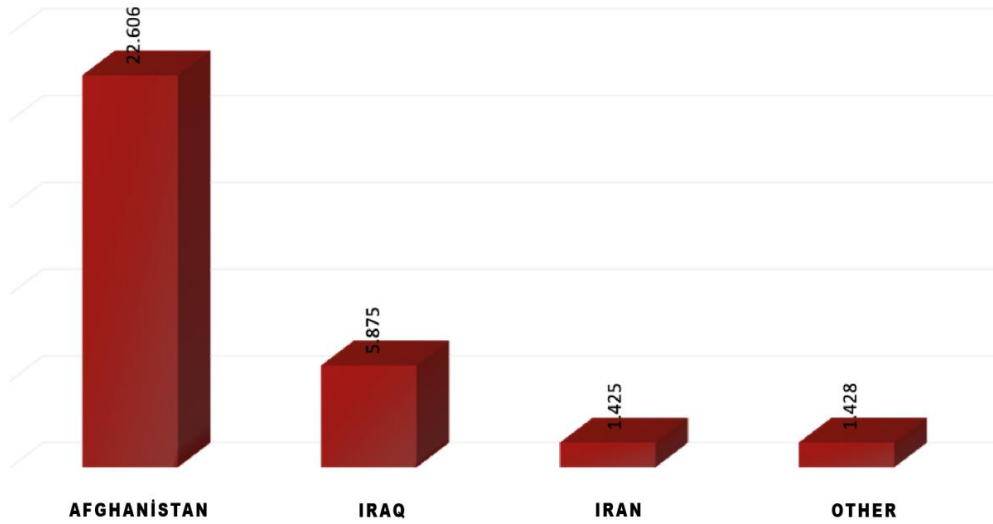


**Initial Assessment of the Current Situation of Afghan Refugees in Turkey**  
**International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation**  
**18.08.2021**

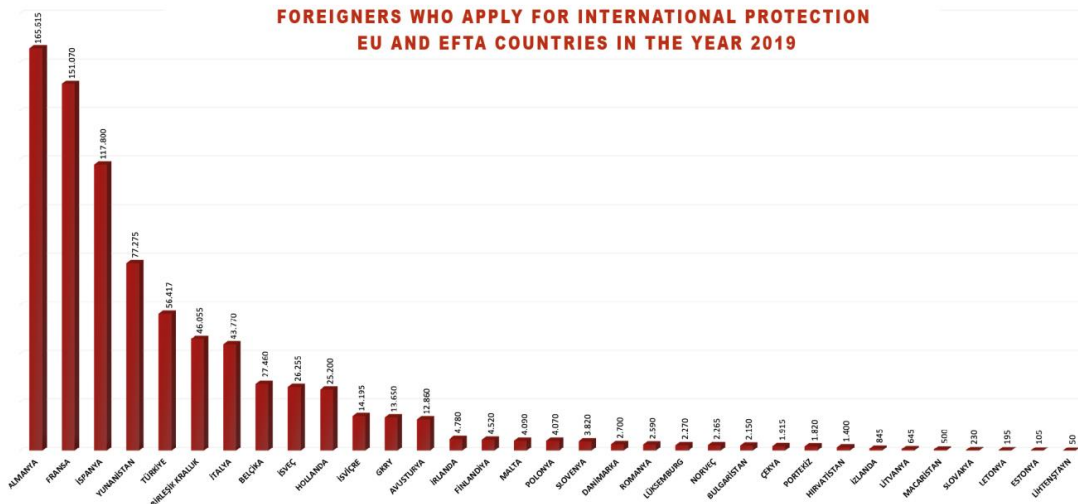
**INTERNATIONAL PROTECTIONS APPLICATIONS BY YEARS**



**FIRST 3 NATIONALITIES APPLICATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION**



**FOREIGNERS WHO APPLY FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION  
EU AND EFTA COUNTRIES IN THE YEAR 2019**





**Initial Assessment of the Current Situation of Afghan Refugees in Turkey  
International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation  
18.08.2021**

Even though Afghan refugees are the second larger refugee group in Turkey, compared to the projects implemented for Syrian refugees, projects for Afghan refugees are very few in number.

As seen in the above-mentioned answers, Afghan refugees' registration problem directly affected their access to the services such as health and education. Due to the registration problem and the difficulty of obtaining International Protection status, non-registered Afghan refugees cannot benefit from health services covered by public health insurance. The General Directorate of Migration Management has stopped insurance as of February 2020, except for those under the age of 18 and over the age of 65. Therefore, adult Afghan refugees, whether male or female, were directly affected by this decision.

Even for Turkey's registered and settled Afghan refugees, there are still many difficulties. For example, due to Turkey's satellite city system, many Afghan refugees and other non-Syrian refugees live in remote cities with few work opportunities and no support networks. Respondents mentioned difficulty learning the Turkish language, finding work with legal rights, poor local integration, psychological issues, and accessing to the health and education services.

Language barrier is the main issues faced by Afghan people in Turkey. The lack of translators of Afghan language and dialects in public institutions, especially in hospitals, make communication difficult between Afghan refugees and public officers. In addition, some people, inside or outside their community take advantage of their vulnerability and ask for money to help them. This situation also causes perpetuation of their vulnerabilities and exploitation.

Afghan refugees do not know their rights and responsibilities due to the lack of dissemination of correct information and language barrier. Legal consultancy and legal information sessions are very important to increase their knowledge about Turkish laws and regulations. As the majority of them are irregular migrants in Turkey, their cases (such as application to IP status, deportation or safely return) should be explained to them by legal advisors.

Also, Afghan students encounter language barrier in schools. Additional Turkish courses are not sufficient due to the high demands, and this negatively affects their adaptation to the school and national education system of Turkey. Afghan students also cannot easily access to university due to lack of documentation (as they are more than 40 years out of their country) and financial resources as part of their limited access to education services. According to field observations and results, Afghan students over the age of 14 are dropping out of school to work for income. According to the latest information, only 55 Afghan students study at universities. Lack of access to education or higher education services leads to underage labour, one of the biggest risks faced by refugee children.

Their status in Turkey brings the issue of work permits. Most of the Afghan refugees are not registered (especially young men), therefore, they are completely living illegally inside Turkey, they cannot request work permission from the relevant authorities, they cannot go to university, and they cannot travel inside Turkey and this situation perpetuates their poverty, and labour exploitation becomes a major problem.

For the last decade, international and national NGOs focused on Syria crisis which is one of the most important humanitarian crises in the world. The implemented projects aimed to improve their life conditions in multiple sectors. However, refuge from Afghanistan is also one of the most significant humanitarian crises in the world, and the Afghan-targeted projects are less common than others. The consistency of their migration flows directly cause the perpetuation of their vulnerability. The future responses should also aim Afghan people and eliminate their sufferings. Poverty, conflicts, violence, discrimination, closed borders, lack of security are part of their lives. The next responses should start with the urgent needs.



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**18.08.2021**

According to the UNHCR's inter-agency round three report, Afghan refugees are one of the most significant vulnerable groups who suffer from more challenges than any other refugee groups in Turkey. Especially access to the health services became a major problem for non-Syrian refugees due to the termination of general public health insurance for 18-60 years old.

Their access to information on rights and services is also problematic since they face language barrier. Reliable and correct information on work permit, residence permit, financial support, access to the education and health, International Protection status and its obligations are needed. According to UNHCR, information on living and settling in Turkey is the most requested need by Afghan refugees.

Similar to IBC's findings, UNHCR report also shows that the levels of continued education are extremely low amongst Afghan refugees. According to UNHCR's findings, Afghan refugees are more likely to participate PEC courses, therefore, their willing should be used for their development plan.

The inter-agency report states that humanitarian assistance is not a key source of income for Afghan refugees. Therefore, employment (informally or formally) is their only option to survive. However, Afghan refugees, generally young/adult men work informally in daily works. They are also one of the most vulnerable labour groups who are negatively affected by the Covid-19. Since they are working in short term and irregular jobs, their employment opportunities are neither safe nor stable. Also, most of them is victim of occupational accidents and they cannot address for this issue due to their informal labour.

Since their irregular migration route (current and previous period) is challenged by many dangers such as human trafficking, violence, sexual abuse, loss of family members, and exploitation, Afghan refugees also face many mental and psychological issues.

Overall, UNHCR report and IBC assessment identifies Afghan households as the most socio-economically vulnerable group.

***Potential interventions***

As a result of above-mentioned findings and data, the potential interventions should be focus on fostering the resilience of Afghan refugees through combining emergency response with protection support. Potential interventions can be divided into two main categories:

- 1. Emergency response for Afghan newcomers who cross the borders without official documentation:** The activities under this category should be based on distribution of basic needs such as food kits (canned or dry food), hygiene packages to prevent Coronavirus spread, sanitary kits especially for women and children (diapers, hygienic pad, etc.), clean drinkable water, and clean clothes. If a camp side will be built in near time, necessary equipment such as tents, sleeping mat, and blanket can be included to the action plan.
- 2. Sustainable and durable solutions for already settled Afghan refugees under International Protection:** The activities under this category should aim to increase knowledge about their status, International Protection regulations, registration, work permit, access to the proper employment opportunities, prevention of child labour, access to the education, prevention of domestic violence, improve local integration and access to the public services to minimize barriers for them. Also, through one-refugee approach, the needs of Afghan refugees should be met according to their specific needs and vulnerabilities. In conclusion, this category is more likely to protection component instead of emergency relief. However, distribution of basic life supplies can be also included to the action plan for already settled Afghan refugees having or no having IP.

Kayseri and Esenyurt fields define the possible actions for potential implementations for both categories:



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**18.08.2021**

- Emergency response for newcomers
- Durable solutions for already settled Afghan refugees in both cities (some of them arrived in Turkey years or months ago)
- Turkish course for already settled Afghan refugees
- Translators (Persian, Pashtun, Tajik, etc.) for newcomers and already settled Afghans
- Information dissemination and legal assistance about application process of IP status for already settled Afghan having no registration
- MHPSS activities for those who suffer from psychological challenges during and after migration route (for newcomers and already settled Afghans)