



# EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye

Priority Area Brief

## Migration and Border Management

June 2026

The overarching objective of EU support in the Migration and Border Management (MBM) priority area in Türkiye is to strengthen the country's capacity to manage migration effectively and in line with human rights standards and the EU *acquis* under Chapter 24.

In this context, interventions are programmed based on EU external assistance and accession priorities and address core policy priorities set out in the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) Strategic Plan (2024–2028).<sup>1</sup> These include reducing irregular migration through improved return systems and measures addressing informal labour pathways; promoting regular migration through more consistent residence permit practices; strengthening border management infrastructure and processes; and facilitating voluntary, safe and dignified returns to Syria.

The portfolio is delivered in partnership with Turkish authorities and international organisations to strengthen institutional and operational capacity in line with international standards.

### The Need for Migration and Border Management Support

Türkiye remains one of the most significant hubs in global displacement dynamics, continuing its decade-long role as host to one of the world's largest refugee and irregular migrant populations.<sup>2</sup> As of 14 May 2026, there are 2,273,325 Syrians under Temporary Protection, a figure that has seen a progressive decrease

from 2,901,478 at the end of 2024 and 2,347,756 at the end of 2025<sup>3</sup> due to ongoing voluntary return processes. Additionally, Türkiye hosts 167,000 international protection applicants and status holders from 61 different countries, predominantly from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Ukraine.<sup>4</sup>



Border management remains central to Türkiye's migration strategy, reflecting both migration pressures and broader security considerations. In recent years, significant progress has been made in strengthening physical and technological border infrastructure, largely in line with or exceeding the targets set in the PMM Strategic Plan for 2025. Security walls reached a total length of 1,323 km, supported by 1,767 km of patrol roads along Türkiye's borders, 1,052 km of border lighting systems (376 km of which camera- and sensor-activated), 362 electro-optical communication and surveillance masts as well as 289 thermal cameras and

<sup>1</sup> PMM, 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. Available from: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/stratejik-planlar>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, Republic of Türkiye Fact Sheet, January 2026. Available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/unhcr-republic-turkiye-fact-sheet-january-2026>

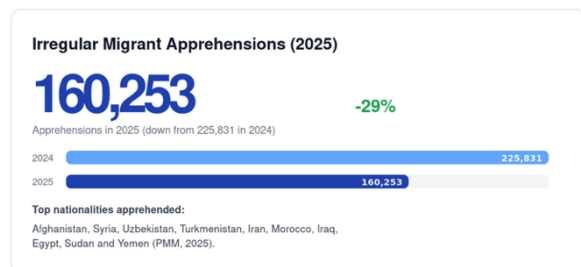
<sup>3</sup> PMM statistics, "Syrians under Temporary Protection by Year". Available from: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> (Accessed 18 May 2026).

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Republic of Türkiye. Available from: [unhcr.org/republic-tuerkiye](https://www.unhcr.org/republic-tuerkiye) (Accessed April 16, 2026).

related elevator systems.<sup>5</sup> Institutional coordination has also improved through the National Coordination and Joint Risk Analysis Centre (UKORAM), which has made progress in integrating data on irregular migration across four ministries via protocols signed with the Coast Guard Command (Ministry of Interior), Ministry of National Defence, Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Health. However, challenges remain in data harmonisation, systems & service architecture (data loss) and interoperability. Efforts to standardise entry and exit procedures at border crossing points have progressed through legislative updates and training.



Irregular migration patterns show a recent downward trend in apprehensions. Turkish authorities apprehended 160,253 irregular migrants in 2025, compared to 225,831 in 2024. As of May 14, 2026, apprehensions for the year stand at 50,705, with Afghan nationals comprising the largest share, followed by migrants from Syria, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen.<sup>6</sup>



Türkiye's approach to irregular migration continues to combine enforcement and return mechanisms. Türkiye operates 32 Removal Centres (RCs) across 25 provinces, with a total capacity of 18,780, unchanged for 2026.<sup>7</sup> Recent SUMAR monitoring findings indicate that many RCs are operating below capacity, reflecting improved screening and return processes, as well as increased use of alternatives to detention (ATDs), especially for vulnerable migrants and those with special needs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> PMM, 2025 Activity Report. Available from: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/faaliyet-raporlari> (Accessed May 18, 2026).  
<sup>6</sup> PMM statistics, Irregular migrants apprehended by year. Available from: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-istatistikler>, (Accessed May 18, 2026).  
<sup>7</sup> PMM, 2025 Activity Report.  
<sup>8</sup> Technical Assistance to Monitor the Performance of EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye (SUMAR) Project, monitoring mission to the

PMM and PDMM personnel also emphasized the positive role of GÖKSEMs in reducing overcrowding by strengthening pre-admission screening, referral, and processing before transfer to RCs.



In 2025, 113,261 irregular migrants were deported, significantly exceeding the annual target of 70,000 in the Strategic Plan but below the 142,536 achieved in 2024.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile 2,694 migrants benefited from Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), also above target.<sup>10</sup> According to PMM reporting, this figure includes returns supported both under IPA funded projects and through the National Assisted Voluntary Return Mechanism, with data provided by IOM and national operational staff. Sustained return volumes continue to underline the need for procedural safeguards and monitoring aligned with human rights standards.

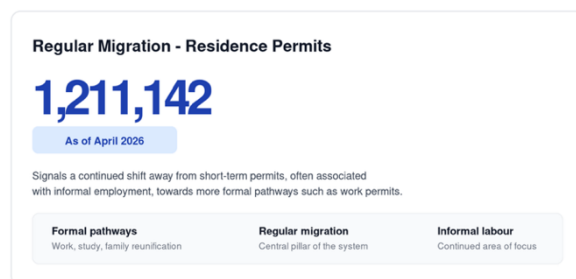


International protection procedures continue to expand in scope and efficiency. In 2025, 63,406 applications were finalised, representing a decrease from the figure for 2024, which stands at 85,125.<sup>11</sup> The backlog of cases remains high, and continued efforts are needed to ensure that the quality and consistency of decisions keep pace with the increased volume of case processing.

project "Supporting the Presidency of Migration Management in the Management, Reception and Hosting of Irregular Migrants – Phase III", dates: 3 March 2026 – 13 March 2026.  
<sup>9</sup> PMM, 2025 Activity Report.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>11</sup> Ibid. The 2024 Activity Report of the PMM shows this figure at 125,125.

## Regarding Syrians under Temporary Protection

Voluntary return efforts have gained prominence in 2025. The cumulative number of Syrians recorded as having returned voluntarily since 2016 reached 1,407,568, with 667,565 Syrians returning following the developments in Syria since December 2024.<sup>12</sup> However, PMM notes that the sustainability of this trend in 2026 remains contingent on evolving security and political conditions, highlighting the dependence of return dynamics on external factors.<sup>13</sup> Qualitative findings from the 2025 SUMAR PEA suggest that refugees' decisions around return may be shaped not only by conditions in Syria but also by challenges with administrative pressures in Türkiye, with participants reporting that difficulties in address verification and identification renewal could affect the voluntariness of return decisions.



A significant policy development affecting Syrians under Temporary Protection was the introduction of co-payment requirements for health services, aligned with the general health insurance system. While reimbursement mechanisms exist for those unable to pay, the reform reflects a broader policy shift aimed at reassessing long-standing entitlements. At the same time, ensuring continued access to essential services for vulnerable groups remains an important consideration. Regular migration remains a central pillar of the system, with residence permit holders reaching 1,211,142 by April 2026.<sup>14</sup> Policy developments indicate a shift away from short-term permits often associated with informal employment towards more formal pathways such as work permits, although informal labour dynamics continue to present challenges.

<sup>12</sup> Anadolu Agency, statement by the Ministry of Interior on returns of Syrians under temporary protection, 4 May 2026, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/icisleri-bakanligindan-suriyelilerin-geri-donusune-iliskin-iddialarla-ilgili-aciklama/3926727> (Accessed 18 May 2026).

<sup>13</sup> PMM, 2025 Activity Report.

<sup>14</sup> PMM, Number of foreigners staying in Türkiye with a residence permit by year. Available from: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/ikamet-izinleri>. (Accessed April 16, 2026).

<sup>15</sup> Supporting Türkiye's Efforts to Strengthen Border Management at the Eastern and South Eastern Land Borders (SAFE) Project,

## EU Support Strategy and Sector Coverage

The European Union has contributed to progress in these areas and is well positioned to address the remaining needs in the MBM sector.

EU support to border management in Türkiye addresses land, air, and maritime domains. At land borders, the EU's flagship intervention implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is in its early implementation phase and aims to strengthen surveillance and operational capacity along the eastern and south-eastern borders.<sup>15</sup> Through the deployment of lighting systems, communication- and surveillance masts, as well as mobile electro-optical cameras, the programme aims to support the transition from often outdated and mine-based border fortification to a lighter yet more effective and humane high-tech system. Importantly, the project integrates human rights safeguards, including a "Do No Harm" analysis and structured engagement with protection actors, aiming to balance increased border control with early identification of vulnerable groups. At air borders, support provided through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) targets systemic coordination challenges at major airports.<sup>16</sup> The intervention focuses on improving inter-service cooperation and standardising procedures (especially in relation to inadmissible passengers) through the development and updating of SOPs, training curricula, risk profiles and pilot testing of integrated measures. Maritime border management is addressed through EU support to the Turkish Coast Guard, aimed at enhancing search and rescue (SAR) capacity and operational effectiveness<sup>17</sup>. The intervention procures modern SAR vessels, with the objective of expanding operational coverage, and increasing the number of migrants intercepted and rescued at sea. Across these strands, EU support combines infrastructure investment with procedural standardisation and institutional coordination.

EU support to irregular migration management spans detection, processing, and reception, while embedding rights-based standards across all stages. In addition, through a newly initiated intervention, the EU supports the Gendarmerie General Command with large-scale

implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), total budget EUR 270,000,000.

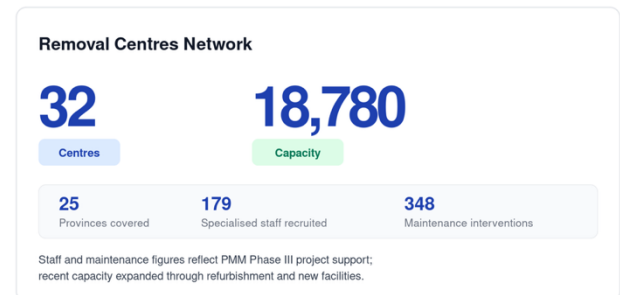
<sup>16</sup> Supporting Border and Migration Management at Airports Project, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), total budget EUR 4,000,000

<sup>17</sup> Improving the Turkish Coast Guard's Operational Capacity through the Supply of Search and Rescue Boats Project, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), total budget EUR 58,000,000

training programmes, development of specialised curricula, and the deployment of modern equipment to enhance identity verification and document fraud detection.<sup>18</sup> This is complemented by the support already being provided to the PMM through a project to support Türkiye’s efforts for efficient migration management,<sup>19</sup> which targets the standardisation and coordination of irregular migration processes across institutions through development of SOPs, strengthening referral mechanisms, and improving access to rights during apprehension, transfer, and administrative procedures. Particular emphasis is placed on alternatives to detention (ATDs), with support to Irregular Migrant Monitoring Bureaus in multiple provinces, as well as on enhancing capacity for vulnerability identification, including age assessment and family link verification. The SUMAR monitoring mission for this project, conducted in October-November 2025, documented that training sessions and workshops on ATDs have contributed to more uniform application of alternative measures across provinces, with the Göç-Bil mobile application emerging as a key enabler of electronic reporting obligations that particularly support women and persons in remote areas under reporting requirements.

For detention-related support, the third phase of the project to support the PMM in the management, reception and hosting of irregular migrants continues to focus on strengthening the capacity and conditions of Removal Centres nationwide.<sup>20</sup> Building on earlier phases, the project combines the recruitment of specialised personnel with targeted infrastructure improvements and system upgrades. The project currently supports 179 staff across centres in 25 provinces in Türkiye, including psychologists, social workers, interpreters, and technical staff. The project also provides support for the development of a comprehensive maintenance and refurbishment framework for all centres, with 348 interventions already completed in project-supported RCs. Investments in digital systems, including the modernisation of GöçNet and the establishment of a Disaster Recovery Centre, further aim to improve operational continuity and data management. The SUMAR monitoring mission conducted in March 2026 at Removal Centres in Niğde, Edirne and Kırklareli

documented tangible improvements in service delivery and accommodation conditions, while also noting that needs differ significantly across centres and that accelerated implementation of the Maintenance, Renovation and Refurbishment Plan across all 32 centres remains a priority.



The effort to return irregular migrants to their countries of origin is supported by the EU through the €40 million programme implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which focuses on strengthening Türkiye’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) system.<sup>21</sup> The intervention supports the development of a structured and standardised national framework (NAVRR), aligning return procedures with international standards and ensuring that returns are voluntary, informed, and rights-based. It combines operational assistance, such as counselling, travel arrangements, and financial support, with reintegration measures in countries of origin, including both cash and in-kind assistance for vulnerable returnees.

EU support to international and temporary protection focuses on improving the efficiency and quality of registration, status determination, and referral procedures while addressing continued caseload pressures. A central component is the €60 million programme implemented by UNHCR, which supports procedural standardisation, backlog reduction measures such as Mobile Decision Units and Decision Centres, strengthening of Country of Origin Information systems, and deployment of additional personnel to PDMs, Verification Centres, and Protection Desks.<sup>22</sup> The programme also supports facility upgrades and referral mechanisms for vulnerable groups. Findings from the 2025 SUMAR PEA further highlighted the importance of accessible legal aid and information

<sup>18</sup> Strengthening the Capacity of the Gendarmerie General Command against Migrant Smuggling Project, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), total budget EUR 5,000,000.

<sup>19</sup> Supporting Türkiye’s Efforts for Efficient Migration Management, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), total budget EUR 4,000,000

<sup>20</sup> Supporting the Presidency of Migration Management in the Management, Reception and Hosting of Irregular Migrants - Phase III

Project, implemented by the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), total budget EUR 82,000,000

<sup>21</sup> Supporting Voluntary Return and Reintegration, and Strengthening National AVRR (NAVRR) Capacities in Türkiye Project, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), total budget EUR 40,000,000

<sup>22</sup> Supporting Türkiye’s International and Temporary Protection Processes Project, implemented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), total budget EUR 60,000,000

services in facilitating refugees' access to registration and status determination procedures. A separate UNHCR-implemented EU intervention focuses specifically on voluntary returns of Syrians under Temporary Protection.<sup>23</sup> This intervention addresses both procedural safeguards and operational capacity, including the establishment of case management systems, verification of voluntariness, and expanded monitoring coverage of return movements. It also provides targeted legal and material assistance to returnees and strengthens conditions at border crossing points through infrastructure improvements and the creation of dedicated facilities, including women- and child-friendly spaces.

EU support to regular migration focuses on strengthening legal pathways and consistent residence permit practices across provinces. Within this framework, an €8 million project implemented by IOM, initiated in the fourth quarter of 2025, strengthens regular migration management systems.<sup>24</sup> This intervention targets both operational and structural aspects of the system, including the deployment of specialised staff to support complex cases, the upgrading of PDMM facilities to better accommodate vulnerable applicants, and the development of technical tools to improve the tracking and management of legal stay. It also places emphasis on training, inter-agency coordination, and migrant outreach, with the aim of improving both the accessibility and transparency of residence permit procedures.

### Looking Ahead



In 2026, the EU-supported Migration and Border Management portfolio enters a transition phase, with several newly initiated projects moving into full implementation while earlier interventions come to a close. This includes the rollout of new IOM-led projects

on regular migration, as well as capacity-building initiatives targeting the Turkish Coast Guard and Gendarmerie General Command. The UNHCR-implemented voluntary return programme will be further expanded by an additional EUR 150 million funding, which includes a component providing assistance in Syria to ensure sustainability of returns. Also the ICMPD-implemented land border security programme will be further topped-up to cover remaining shortfalls esp. along Türkiye's border with Iraq.



Ongoing efforts under the ICMPD SAFE programme, to be further strengthened by an additional €161 million allocation, alongside maritime support to the Turkish Coast Guard, will continue to reinforce border management capacities. The results of the completed IOM migration management project will feed into subsequent interventions, supporting continuity.

With a total envelope of approximately €937 million (including contracts in the pipeline), the EU portfolio maintains a comprehensive approach across border management, irregular migration, return, protection, and regular migration. The portfolio will continue to combine institutional strengthening, operational support, and procedural improvements, while remaining aligned with human rights standards and the EU acquis.

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<sup>23</sup> Strengthening of national mechanisms for voluntary, safe, dignified and orderly returns to Syria Project, implemented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), total budget EUR 95,000,000

<sup>24</sup> Strengthening the Management of Regular Migration in Türkiye Project, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), total budget EUR 8,000,000