Türkiye was hit by a series of debilitating earthquakes on 6 February 2023. A total of 11 provinces were affected by these earthquakes, and the government’s ‘Türkiye Earthquakes Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment’ estimated that the damage to municipal services in these provinces was around USD 302 million. Meanwhile, there were no reports of the earthquakes having significantly damaged any of the EU refugee programme-supported municipal infrastructure works.

Türkiye continues to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world with around 3.5 million refugees and asylum seekers. Most of the Syrian refugees (3,338,698) are granted temporary protection status. In addition to these, there are close to 318,000 international protection applicants from countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

A large majority of the refugees in Türkiye settled in the south-eastern region, as well as in the metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir and Konya. The top ten provinces in terms of the number of refugees as a proportion of the local population are Kilis (51%), Gaziantep (21%), Hatay (19%), Şanlıurfa (16%), Mersin (12%), Adana (11%), Mardin (10%), Kahramanmaraş (8%), Osmaniye (7%), and Bursa (6%). The Municipalities in these provinces are facing the highest level of pressure upon their basic services. Moreover, the 11 provinces affected by the earthquakes included seven of these ten highest-refugee-concentration provinces.

Municipalities are among the primary responders in providing support to Syrian refugees, as almost all of the refugees are living amongst host communities (very few continue to remain in refugee camps). The sudden increase in the population in some urban areas has contributed to a worsening of environmental problems in those provinces where the refugee population is particularly significant.

The EU has allocated EUR 9 billion under the EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye programme to support the Government of Türkiye to manage the challenges presented by the influx of refugees since 2011. One of the priorities of the EU financing is to support municipalities with essential municipal services including water supply and sanitation, solid waste management and local infrastructure to support the provision of recreational services. A total of four projects supporting municipal services have been implemented by the EU refugee support programme since it started. By June 2023, the EU had allocated

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2 The Government of Türkiye refers to these people as ‘Syrians under Temporary Protection’ (SuTPs) or ‘People Under International Protection’ (PuIPs).
3 UNHCR Türkiye Bi-annual Fact Sheet, February 2023.
approximately EUR 380 million to municipal services improvement projects.

The Need for Municipal Infrastructure Improvement Support

Türkiye used to be one of the most water-rich countries in the Mediterranean. However, due to a significant population increase starting in the 1980s, it is now listed among the most water-stressed countries. Furthermore, the amount of water available per capita is expected to decline steadily over the next ten years as the population continues to increase. The sudden arrival of refugees led to additional stress being placed on certain types of municipal services such as potable water supplies, sanitation and solid waste management.

According to the 2020 Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) data, whilst 78% of municipal residents in the country were served by wastewater treatment plants, the average for the ten provinces with the highest refugee concentration was significantly lower at 70%. The figures for the percentage of the municipal populations served by sewerage networks were somewhat better: 91% for Türkiye as a whole and 83% for the ten provinces as referenced above. Solid waste management is also a critical issue for municipalities as a significant proportion of solid waste is dumped in wild dumpsites and watercourses, particularly in rural areas.

TÜİK data (for 2020) also indicated that although 99% of the people living in urban areas in Türkiye had access to piped water supply in their residences, only 61% of municipalities had access to water treatment plants to supply potable water. The number was even lower at 50% for the 10 provinces with the highest proportion of Syrian refugees. Non-Revenue Water (NRW) - water which is lost through leakages from piped water systems due to old or poorly maintained water supply networks – is another significant problem, especially for the municipalities in the south-eastern provinces. According to the World Bank, some municipalities in this region were experiencing over 50% NRW rates in 2018-19.


5 According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_s-policy-on-water-issues.en.mfa), currently 1,350 cubic meters of water per capita is available annually. By the year 2030, this amount is expected to decline to 1,000 cm³ with an expected population of 100 million.


7 Kilis, Gaziantep, Hatay, Sanlıurfa, Mersin, Adana, Mardin, Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye, and Kayseri.

8 Municipal Services Improvement Project – Project Appraisal Document (March 2020).
Recreational infrastructure is an area where municipalities require support to ensure children and youth’s mental and physical well-being. In 2023, 70% of registered Syrian refugees were children and young adults under the age of 30. As the refugees tend to live in the poorer parts of the towns and cities, it is of crucial importance that these neighbourhoods have at least a minimum level of recreational infrastructure. Access to recreational facilities (such as football fields, tennis courts and youth centres) in such neighbourhoods is an essential pre-requisite for conducting activities involving both refugee and host communities and therefore in promoting improved social cohesion.

EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye Strategy

The EU’s strategy in the municipal infrastructure priority area covers improvement in water supply and sanitation and solid waste management systems and recreational infrastructure provided by municipalities. At the beginning of the EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye programme, only one project supporting municipal infrastructure development was implemented by the EU refugee support programme. This project included the construction of several wastewater and solid waste management facilities in four southeastern provinces. Municipal infrastructure development later became a major area of focus of the EU support programme as the need to assist the Government of Türkiye in supporting municipalities with a high refugee influx has become increasingly critical.

Two new projects covering potable water supply, sanitation and solid waste management in 13 provinces, and one project working with the Ministry of Youth and Sports providing recreational infrastructure started in 2020\(^9\). The overall objective is to ensure that services are provided at the scale and reliability required while the negative effects of the service provision on the local environment is minimised and the economics of service delivery for the municipalities are improved.

Improving water supply and sanitation systems

Two facilities were constructed in the water supply and sanitation area - a wastewater treatment plant in Hatay and a solar drying (of waste from sanitation) facility in Kilis. By June 2023, both facilities were in operation.

The EU refugee support programme has financed an additional 32 new water supply and sanitation sub-projects (either new constructions or the upgrading of existing facilities). A total of 17 municipalities (mostly in the South-East) will benefit from this support. By the end of June 2023, 20 of the 32 additional facilities were still at the early design and procurement stage (Step 1), while four sub-projects were at Step 2 and eight sub-projects were at Step 3\(^10\). As a result of the progress made over the first half of 2023 (with eight sub-projects advancing to a subsequent stage), the average sub-project completion level increased from 27% to 31%.

Approximately 180,000 people have benefited from the two completed sanitation sub-projects (4% target achievement rate). When the 33 facilities are completed, a total of over 2.8 million people are expected to benefit from improved access to safely-managed municipal water supply services and over 4.4 million people are expected to benefit from improved access to safely-managed municipal sanitation services.

Improving solid waste management capacity

The EU support for improving the capacities of targeted municipalities to manage their solid waste in an environmentally sensitive way started with the construction of six sub-projects at the beginning of the EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye. By the end of the first half of 2023, all six of these facilities were completed and all were operational. These included building contractors was ongoing. Step 2 means that their contracting of constructors and consultants was completed and that construction permits had been granted. Step 3 means that their physical construction was ongoing.

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9 Adana, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kayseri, Kilis, Konya, Malatya, Mardin, Mersin, Osmaniye and Şanlıurfa.
10 Step 1 means that their pre-construction planning (including detailed design work) as well as their contracting of consultants and
four waste transfer stations (three in Hatay and one in Şanlıurfa), a leachate management facility in Kilis, and a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility in Gaziantep. The MBT facility serves the processing of solid waste from seven districts of Gaziantep province.

Four additional solid waste management (SWM) facilities are currently being developed, all of which were at Step 1 (planning and contracting) as of June 2023. Relatively slow progress experienced in the construction of the facilities was originally attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, urban planning issues and project procurement-related factors. However, the situation was further aggravated in 2023 with the earthquakes. Although external consultants were contracted for three projects and were already at the stage of design review and tender preparation at the beginning of 2023, all operations were stopped because of the earthquakes and the construction commencement was postponed to the beginning of 2024. Hence, the average completion level of the SWM facilities remained unchanged at 67% at the end of June 2023.

Almost 600,000 people have benefitted from access to improved solid waste management services by the end of June 2023 as a result of the EU support provided. When the second round of sub-projects are completed, over 3 million people are expected to benefit from improved access to safely managed municipal solid waste management services.

Increasing recreational services capacity

To increase access to recreational facilities in high-refugee-concentration provinces and thereby to contribute to improved social cohesion between refugee and host communities is one of the aims of the EU recreational services project. The project, which began in August 2020, is expected to cover 22 facilities in 12 provinces in the south-east of Türkiye.

By the end of June 2023, three construction works contracts were signed covering the construction of twelve football fields, one tennis court, five youth centres, four training halls and a swimming pool. Construction work began in 2022. The project experienced good progress in the second half of the year with the construction of eleven football fields and one tennis court reaching 95% completion rate; and the average sub-project completion rate increasing from 17% to 43%. However, due to the earthquakes, construction of the youth centres, training halls and the swimming pool was delayed, and the average sub-project completion rate remained at 43% at the end of June 2023.