

Communication with communities

CONTEXT AND PRIORITIES

Communicating with refugees is a vital component of UNHCR's work in Turkey. In cooperation with the Government of Turkey and a wide range of partners, UNHCR works to provide refugees and asylum-seekers with the information that they need to access protection and assistance as well as to make informed decisions about their lives. UNHCR aims to receive feedback from refugee communities to tailor its communication to the needs of affected communities. Two-way communication between UNHCR and the people it serves not only ensures the effectiveness and quality of UNHCR's programmes, but is key to accountability and transparency.



UNHCR staff speaks to a Syrian refugee family in Gaziantep. © UNHCR/Emrah Gürel

Strategic Approach

UNHCR's communication with communities (CwC) strategy comprises of three key areas:

- **Effective two-way communication and information dissemination channels:** UNHCR aims to have a holistic approach to CwC so that refugees and asylum-seekers can access a full range of channels and tools to communicate and receive information. UNHCR therefore complements its long-standing use of "traditional" communication channels such as counselling, outreach, information sessions, participatory assessments, and printed materials, with a range of telecommunications and online tools. These include the UNHCR Counselling Line, a dedicated call centre where refugees can call and receive individual counselling; the use of SMSs for notices and alerts on assistance programmes; three websites that specifically provide information to refugees

and asylum-seekers (Help, Services Advisor and Results); and a dedicated CwC Facebook page where refugees can receive information in a shareable way and ask questions.

- **Coordination:** As part of its coordination function under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), UNHCR works to enhance inter-agency coordination and collaboration on CwC-related activities through a CwC Technical Taskforce. Building on a mapping exercise in 2017 which identified the range of CwC channels and tools used in the refugee response in Turkey, and on a 2018/2019 survey on communication needs and tools of refugees, UNHCR is engaging with partners to identify gaps, provide technical advice and support, and promote the use of good CwC practices throughout all sectors of the refugee response.
- **Cooperation with the authorities:** UNHCR aims at cooperating on CwC with a number of national institutions, most notably the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), and the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS). UNHCR and the latter two institutions work closely together to produce and disseminate information material.

Communication with communities survey

In 2018/2019, cognizant of the need to enhance its evidence base for communication with communities interventions, UNHCR carried out a survey to collect disaggregated data on the communication and information needs, preferences and perceptions of Syrians under temporary protection as well as Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan international protection applicants and refugees. In total, 4,978 people participated in the survey, and 247 in the FGDs that were carried out as a complement to the telephone survey interviews.

Findings on communication sources, tools and needs indicate that:

- The **principal sources** of information for persons of concern are **unofficial** and **informal**, both off-line (through informal networks) and online (through group platforms such as Facebook). Given the informal nature of the channels, refugees feel uncertain about the authenticity of the information they have. Moreover, these channels pose the risk of being prone to inadvertent or deliberate misinformation and misunderstandings, which can spread quickly to a wider population within a short period of time.
- **Official sources**, such as national authorities, United Nations agencies, and partners, were the most **trusted** sources to provide accurate information.
- There is a widespread use of **digital channels** and **tools** among persons of concern. This confirms the need for UNHCR and its partners to make greater use of these in communicating and providing information.
- **Information gaps** remain among the refugee population on their rights, obligations and the services available to them in Turkey. A majority of respondents indicated that they are not sufficiently informed of their rights and obligations. Follow-up focus group discussions, however, suggest that refugees tend to have the necessary information, while considering themselves insufficiently informed.

Face-to-face engagement

UNHCR engages with refugees face to face through a number of channels, including focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews. These are conducted on a regular basis to provide protection counselling, share information, monitor the implementation of UNHCR's programme, or get feedback from refugees on specific topics. As part of UNHCR's Policy on Age,



57

sessions of

**Focus Group Discussions
conducted in 2019**

Gender and Diversity (AGD), UNHCR Turkey conducts regular participatory assessments and focus-group discussions. The policy recognizes women and men of all ages in the community as active participants in decision-making and motivates them to express their needs and decide their own future with a view to their empowerment. Participation of refugees and asylum seekers when defining priorities and designing programmes is critical for serving, assisting, and protecting persons of concern. Refugees and asylum seekers of different age and gender groups, different educational and professional backgrounds, different special needs and with differences in the duration of their stay in Turkey are selected to participate to obtain a wider perspective on the situation and coping mechanisms.

Counselling lines

Protection counselling is an important activity in the refugee response in Turkey. Persons of concern approach UNHCR and its partners to share protection concerns, ask for advice on specific matters, including legal problems or enquire about the status of their files. In addition to the counselling work provided by its partners, UNHCR also responds to requests for protection counselling through its two counselling lines, the UNHCR Counselling Line established in March 2017, and a Şanlıurfa-specific call centre set up in March 2018 in cooperation with the Şanlıurfa Governorate. Both counselling lines have dedicated counsellors trained to answer queries on the full spectrum of rights, obligations, services and procedures relating to refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey, as well as to make any necessary referrals for follow-up action. In 2018, more than 178,000 refugees received counselling through the line, while during the first half of 2019, close to 118,000 refugees were counselled. In July 2019, UNHCR restructured the UNHCR Counselling Line, focusing on the capacity development of the counsellors, as well as development of effective referral pathways to handle incoming requests and queries.



close to

118,000

refugees counselled between
January and July 2019

UNHCR
Counselling Line

Online platforms

In order to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers have the reliable information they need, UNHCR uses a number of complementary online platforms and channels.

Results website

First established in 2006, the website is designed to allow refugees and asylum-seekers, in eight languages, to access their status details for the individual processing for resettlement and financial support as well as to update some basic information such as phone numbers, ID number and city of residence. Through the platform, users are also directed to relevant online resources. Since its creation, there have been nearly 12 million visits to the site. Check the Results website at <https://results.unhcr.org.tr/default.aspx>.

Help

Launched in 2017, the Help website for Turkey provides refugees with information on a wide range of key themes, ranging from registration to livelihoods. The platform is available in the languages most frequently spoken by refugees and asylum-seekers living in Turkey, and in English and Turkish. In addition to specifically targeting refugees, the website also serves a coordination role as it guides partner organizations and other stakeholders in accurately producing messaging on technical issues. By the end of 2018, over 384,000 users were accessing the Help website. In July 2019 the website has 530,000 users. Check it out at <http://help.unhcr.org/turkey> and share the link further.



530,000

users by July 2019

Help
website

Services Advisor

Also launched in 2017, Services Advisor is a platform that enables refugees to locate available humanitarian and governmental services closest to them in a simple and user-friendly manner. The information is displayed in Arabic, Farsi, Pashtu, Kurdish, English and Turkish. By the end of 2018, over 137,000 users were accessing Services Advisor. In July 2019 the website has over 184,000 users. Check it out at <https://turkey.servicesadvisor.org> and share further.



over

184,000

users by July 2019

Services
Advisor

In order to facilitate access to Help and Services Advisor, UNHCR will install 20 kiosks in the premises of service providers, in provinces densely populated by refugees. The kiosks will enable persons of concern to easily access and navigate the available information on these platforms and print out information relevant to them.

UNHCR Turkey Information Board

End of 2018, UNHCR launched, on Facebook, an information board to provide refugees with information and news in an accessible, attractive and shareable format in Arabic, Farsi, Turkish and English. Although UNHCR does not provide individual counselling on the page for protection reasons, the page enables comments and general queries to be received and responded to, thus enhancing UNHCR's two-way communication with persons of concern. As of August 2019, the Facebook page has over 35,000 followers. The Information Board can be accessed here: <https://www.facebook.com/unhcrturkeyinfo>

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LINKS

[Regional Portal - Syria Regional Refugee Response](#) | [Regional Portal - Mediterranean](#) | [UNHCR Turkey website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Services Advisor](#) | [UNHCR Help](#)