

# Navigating Services:

## An Exploratory Study on Afghan Youth Refugees in Ankara

***"Our voice must be heard"***

Afghan Male, 29

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## An Exploratory Study on Afghan Youth Refugees in Ankara

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### Research Period

January – June 2025

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with financial support from Terre Des Homes (TDH), Germany

### Suggested Citation

Development Minds (2025). *Navigating Services: An Exploratory Study on Afghan Youth Refugees in Ankara*. Ankara: DED and TDH



This report was prepared by the Development Minds in close coordination with Dünya Evimiz Derneği (DED) under the project funded by Terre Des Homes (TDH)- Germany.

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# Executive Summary

This exploratory study explores the challenges, opportunities, insights and experiences of young Afghan refugees in Ankara, focusing on access to services, service effectiveness and pathways to social and economic integration. The study aims to provide insight into the coping mechanisms, perceptions and needs of young Afghan refugees, with a particular focus on their access to education, health, shelter, livelihoods, protection, social assistance and social cohesion. The study also aims to inform humanitarian programming and advocacy efforts by providing contextualized information on the daily realities of young Afghan refugees in Türkiye.

The research adopts a qualitative methodology based on a participatory approach. A total of 6 focus group discussions were conducted with total 38 (24% male, 76% female) Afghan refugees aged between 15-30 (58%) and 31-45 (42%), as well as 8 key informant interviews with service providers, community leaders and external stakeholders. Furthermore, these qualitative research methods were validated and supported by service mapping including 12 service providers and 3 round table meetings with relevant stakeholders. Data was collected in several neighborhoods in Ankara known to be largely populated by Afghans. Analysis was guided by thematic coding, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of cross-cutting issues such as gender, legal status and generational differences.

**The findings reveal that the restrictive legal environment and limited humanitarian support in Türkiye constitute key barriers to Afghan refugees' access to rights and services.** Many Afghan youth, especially those without international protection status or with pending applications, are living in legal limbo. ID inactivation is common, with many Afghan participants reporting that their ID (the document that identifies status) is often canceled or not renewed without clear justification or notice. The loss of legal documentation impacts on individuals' access to health care, education, employment, shelter, social assistance and legal protection, and increases their vulnerability.



**Protection concerns emerged at multiple levels especially due to legal uncertainty.** Young Afghan women reported significant restrictions on their mobility and participation in daily activities, and difficulties in accessing services based on bureaucratic processes, language barriers and gender norms. For men, they reported being unable to leave the house for fear of transfer to repatriation centers, especially when their identity cards are cancelled. In the absence of legal protections and documentation, many young people are vulnerable to insecure living conditions such as domestic violence, labor exploitation, psychological problems and economic difficulties.

**Access to essential services is very limited, particularly health, shelter, livelihoods, education and social assistance.** Although registered individuals are officially allowed to access health care, many Afghans face barriers due to language difficulties, lack of translators, high continuation costs of the treatment, changes in procedures and complex bureaucratic processes. Unregistered individuals are often turned away from hospitals or required to pay very high costs. While there are no major challenges in accessing education at primary school age, access to education at high school and higher education levels also poses status, address-specific and cost-based challenges. For mental and reproductive health services, barriers are exacerbated by cultural stigma and lack of gender-sensitive programs.

**The service landscape in Ankara is also characterized by very specific dynamics. While there are a variety of organizations providing services, they are limited in scope and often lack sustainability and comprehensiveness.** Recent developments raise uncertainty about the future of humanitarian support to Afghans in Türkiye. Shifts in donor priorities, reduced funding, social tension and a growing political agenda for returns cause concerns among both humanitarian actors and Afghan communities. While communication between actors is strong, coordination is inadequate and bureaucratic processes are lengthy. Although there is duplication of services such as legal counseling and case management, there are critical service gaps such as psychosocial support, medical support, job placement and education support. There is also an obvious need to improve the scope of existing services to increase services' impact and sustainability.

**Furthermore, the social and economic integration of Afghan youth in Ankara remains limited due to legal uncertainties, language barriers and limited livelihood opportunities.** Many Afghans struggle to access formal employment due to lack of work permits and official documents, forcing them into informal labor markets where wages are low and exploitation is widespread. Even informal employment is becoming more difficult for men in particular due to the ID-related problem and increased security checks. Furthermore, restrictive gender norms combine with systemic barriers to limit Afghan women's economic participation and visibility in public spaces. Social integration is further hindered by limited interaction with host communities, except where common linguistic or cultural characteristics facilitate more smooth relations such as among Turkmen

Afghans. However, several community-based efforts led by NGOs through youth clubs and Youth Centers under the Ministry of Youth and Sports offer encouraging pathways to increase cohesion and participation.

Despite these challenges, the study also highlights opportunities for service access, increased resilience and effectiveness of services for the Afghan refugee community. Community-led initiatives, peer support networks and youth clubs may play an important role in promoting social inclusion and psychosocial well-being. Translation support and efforts to address language barriers may offer opportunities to increase accessibility of a number of existing services. The arrangement to include Afghans in the animal husbandry sector may create opportunities for Afghans to participate in formal employment and access services, particularly for Afghans who have been rejected from applying for the international protection and identity inactivated. Recent initiatives to increase coordination between stakeholders may provide a critical role to more effectively address systemic barriers.

**Overall, the findings underline the need for a holistic, intersectional and participatory approach to programming interventions for Afghan refugees.** Addressing structural barriers, expanding gender and culturally responsive services, and planning programs with sustainable community-based models are critical measures to improve the well-being and integration of Afghan youth in Ankara. Furthermore, support mechanisms should consider the cross-cutting vulnerabilities faced by Afghan youth and provide safe and inclusive spaces where their voices are heard. The recommendations developed with stakeholders and Afghan participants offer concrete and actionable steps to guide humanitarian actors.





## 1

# Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Exploratory Study on Afghan Youth Refugees, conducted by Development Minds as part of Dünya Evimiz Derneği's (DED) "Strengthening Refugee Youth Resilience and Social Cohesion in Ankara" project.

Funded by the Volkswagen Employees Foundation and implemented in collaboration with Terre des Hommes (TDH) Germany, the project aims to enhance the resilience and integration of Afghan youth refugees in Ankara. In line with its objectives, it implements targeted interventions such as outreach efforts, information sessions on responsibilities, rights and services, case management support, and youth club activities to foster social cohesion. The project aims to reach 500 young individuals, while indirectly benefiting 3,000 people within refugee and host communities. By equipping Afghan youth refugees with information, access to services, and support networks, these interventions seek to improve their well-being, strengthen their self-sufficiency, and facilitate social inclusion.

As one component of this effort, the exploratory study assesses Afghan youth refugees' access to essential services, identifies barriers and opportunities, and provides evidence-based actionable recommendations to improve service provision, integration efforts and future interventions in Ankara. Initially, the study focused on livelihood opportunities; however, insights from preliminary research, project implementation, and the kick-off meeting with DED revealed the need to broaden its scope. Afghan youth refugees face major legal, social, and economic barriers to both formal and informal employment, along with uncertainty regarding their legal status, limited awareness of available services, and difficulties in accessing basic needs such as healthcare, education, shelter and nutrition. Furthermore, the continued demand for protection, psychosocial support, social assistance and legal counseling services underscored the necessity for a more comprehensive approach. In response, this study was expanded to assess access

to a broader range of essential services, including protection, social assistance, livelihoods, legal assistance, healthcare, education, psychosocial support, and other humanitarian programs.



The study examines the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of these services, analyzing the specific needs of Afghan youth refugees, the challenges they face, and the legal and institutional barriers affecting service access.



The research methodology integrates a service mapping exercise, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and round-table meetings to gather insights from refugee youth, community leaders, governmental institutions, NGOs, INGOs, and other relevant stakeholders.

Despite the significant presence of Afghan youth refugees in Türkiye, updated and comprehensive research on their access to essential services remains limited. This study is among the first to provide a detailed, multi-sectoral assessment of service accessibility in Ankara. Notably, the implementation phase of this project is the first of its kind and establishes a baseline for targeted interventions and future programming for Afghan refugee youth in Türkiye. By identifying opportunities, challenges, service gaps, and barriers, this study fills a major knowledge gap and serves as a valuable resource for service providers, target populations, policymakers, and humanitarian actors.

To guide this exploratory study, the following key research questions are explored:

- What types of basic services are currently available to Afghan youth refugees in Ankara?
- What are the key challenges and barriers Afghan youth refugees face in accessing these services?
- How effective are existing service delivery mechanisms in meeting the needs of Afghan youth refugees?
- What are the legal, social, and institutional factors influencing Afghan youth refugees' access to services?
- What recommendations can be made to improve service accessibility, coordination, and effectiveness for Afghan youth refugees?

By providing a comprehensive analysis of available services, existing gaps, and systemic barriers, this study aims to inform future programming, strengthen service coordination, and enhance policy frameworks to improve the well-being and inclusion of Afghan youth refugees in Türkiye.

# 2





## Methodological Approach

### 2.1 Research Design

The exploratory study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design to explore the dynamics of services for Afghan refugee youth in Ankara. The methodology combines service mapping, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and round-table meetings to gather comprehensive insights. The exploratory study also leverages secondary data sources, including government reports, academic studies, UN and NGO publications, and statistical databases on services provisions and demographics. By integrating multiple data collection methods, this approach enables a comprehensive and participatory perspective to support future intervention strategies. It also provides a structured framework for both contextual and thematic analyses, with the flexibility needed to explore dynamic developments.



**Table 1.** Research Design

 <b>Main Research Objectives</b>	 <b>Secondary Data Sources</b>	 <b>Primary Data Sources</b>	 <b>Data Collection Methods</b>
<p>Assess the services available to Afghan youth refugees in Ankara.</p> <p>Identify existing gaps, challenges, opportunities and barriers in accessing services</p> <p>Providing evidence-based information and reflecting the perceptions of the actors.</p> <p>Propose practical suggestions that foster a continuous learning and improvement framework.</p> <p>Contribute to the design of future intervention programming.</p>	<p>Project Progress Reports of DED.</p> <p>Academic Articles</p> <p>Government reports and policies such as legal regulations, labor market policies and refugee support mechanisms.</p> <p>Publications from relevant UN counterparts, INGOs and NGOs.</p> <p>Statistical Database related to labor market, demographics, and employment trends.</p>	<p>Government Officials</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>I/NGO Representatives</p> <p>Afghan Youth</p> <p>Community Leaders</p> <p>Representatives from UN Organizations</p>	<p>Service Mapping Exercise including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying organizations</li> <li>• Identifying services</li> <li>• Identifying programs</li> </ul> <p>Focus Group Discussions with Afghan Youth Refugees</p> <p>Key Informant Interview with key stakeholders</p> <p>Round Table Meeting with relevant stakeholders</p>

## 2.2 Rata Collection Methods

### 2.2.1 Service Mapping Exercise

The service mapping exercise constitutes an important step of the study by enabling the systematic identification of organizations, programs and services providing relevant support to Afghan youth refugees in Ankara. This process includes a desk review of relevant reports, policies and online/offline resources to map key actors, including government agencies, NGOs, INGOs and UN agencies. DED's knowledge, experiences and relationships with relevant service providers and their types of services are leveraged during service mapping exercise. The service mapping exercise also categorizes services according to their availability, accessibility and relevance. This enables it to identify both existing opportunities and service gaps.

Beyond identifying available services, the service mapping exercise also explores eligibility criteria, social assistance mechanisms, coordination efforts, and prog-

ram effectiveness. Additionally, it assesses referral pathways and collaboration frameworks among service providers to understand how Afghan refugee youth engage with and navigate the existing support systems. By mapping and analyzing these factors, this study presents a comprehensive overview of the service landscape, highlighting available services, barriers and gaps in service provision.

## 2.2.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) serve as a primary qualitative data collection method, providing key informants' insights into the essential services for Afghan youth refugees in Ankara. These semi-structured interviews are conducted with government officials, local authorities, NGO and INGO representatives, UN agencies and community leaders who play a role in designing, implementing, or overseeing interventions. Moreover, the KIIs offer in-depth perspectives on service effectiveness, accessibility, and existing challenges, complementing the findings from the service mapping exercise.

The key informant interviews explore key themes such as:

- Current services available for Afghan refugee youth.
- Barriers and challenges in accessing services.
- Coordination and referral mechanisms among service providers.
- Policy gaps and recommendations to enhance service delivery.
- Perceptions of Afghan refugee youth's integration efforts.

The table below presents one participant of the 8 KIIs conducted throughout the exploratory study.

**Table 2.** KII Participants

Institution Type	Participant	Date
NGO/INGO	Ankara Bar Association	19.03.25
UN Organizations	UNHCR	26.02.25
Community Leader	Woman Community Leader	24.02.25
NGO/INGO	Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF)	20.02.25
Government Institution	Altındağ Social Services Center	28.02.25
NGO/INGO	Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) Altındağ Community Center	25.02.25
Community Leader	Mukhtar	24.02.25
NGO/INGO	Dünya Evimiz Derneği (DED)	19.02.25

\*Location: Ankara



### 2.2.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) serve as a critical qualitative data collection method to capture the firsthand experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by Afghan refugee youth in accessing essential services in Ankara. These discussions provide deep insights into their needs, service accessibility barriers, and overall experiences, complementing the findings from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and the service mapping exercise. Focusing on the thoughts and experiences of refugee youth, FGDs ensure that the study reflects their lived realities, needs, concerns and expectations.

Each FGD followed a semi-structured format, guided by key themes such as:

- **Access to essential services:**

Awareness, availability, and experiences with livelihoods, healthcare, education, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and social aid programs.

- **Perceptions of service effectiveness:**

Accessibility, quality, and responsiveness of services to their specific needs.

- **Barriers to accessing services:**

Legal restrictions, language barriers, documentation issues, social stigma, and institutional challenges, etc.

- **Aspirations and recommendations:**

Identifying service gaps, improving outreach efforts, and suggesting solutions to enhance Afghan youth refugees' access to services.

**Table 3.** Focus Group Discussions

Gender	Numbers of Participant	Age Range 15-30	Age Range 31 -45	Date
Male	5	1	4	09.05.25
Female	6	4	1	27.02.25
Female	5	4	2	08.03.25
Male	4	1	3	09.05.25
Female	6	6	0	08.03.25
Female	12	7	5	08.03.25

*\*Location: Ankara*

Although the primary focus of the study was on Afghan youth aged 15 to 30, individuals between the ages of 31 and 45 were also included in the data colle-

ction process. This approach was adopted to capture a broader perspective and to identify intersecting or diverging dynamics across different age groups. To ensure inclusive participation, the focus group discussions (FGDs) were structured to reflect diversity in age and gender. The target group therefore consisted of Afghan refugee youth and adults aged 15–45. Separate sessions were held for men and women to facilitate open dialogue and to reflect gender-specific experiences. In total, 6 FGDs were conducted with 38 Afghan participants throughout the exploratory study.

The discussions were conducted in a safe and inclusive setting in coordination with DED, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Findings from the FGDs underwent thematic analysis to identify key trends, recurring challenges, and opportunities for improving access to essential services. These insights directly contributed to the round-table meeting, where stakeholders review findings, discuss service gaps, and develop evidence-based recommendations to enhance service accessibility and coordination for Afghan youth refugees.

## 2.2.4 Round-Table Meetings

The round-table meetings served as a platform for collaborative dialogue, information exchange, and strategic planning among key stakeholders involved in improving Afghan youth refugees' access to essential services. These discussions brought together government institutions, NGOs, INGOs, chambers, academicians, UN agencies, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders to validate findings and recommendations from the service mapping exercise, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The meetings facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement and aim to develop practical solutions to enhance service accessibility, strengthen coordination, and improve integration efforts for Afghan youth refugees in Ankara. Moreover, the feedback and recommendations gathered contribute to inform future interventions.

Three round-table meetings focused on a specific objective to ensure a structured and targeted discussion.

### 1<sup>st</sup> RTMs

#### Legal and Administrative Barriers:

This session was organized in collaboration with the Ankara Bar Association on World Refugee Day and gathered representatives from public institutions, legal professionals, civil society organizations and refugee rights advocates. The discussion focused on legal and documentation challenges, such as the issuance and deactivation of identity cards, access to basic services. Study findings were presented and participants discussed actionable steps to address systemic challenges and improve the legal protection environment for Afghan refugees.





## 2<sup>nd</sup> RTMs

### Community Voices:

This roundtable was coordinated by DED with the participation of representatives from Afghan communities. To ensure an inclusive dialog, research findings were presented and experiences in accessing basic services were discussed. Recommendations for improving coordination and accessibility were outlined.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> RTMs

### Advocacy and Dissemination with External Stakeholders:

This roundtable was structured with a dissemination and advocacy purpose to share the findings of the study with wider audiences, including media representatives, private sector, universities and other relevant external actors. Participants reviewed key insights from the research and raised awareness on the challenges faced by Afghan youth refugees in Ankara and discussed recommendations.

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Each meeting ensured interactive discussions, stakeholder feedback sessions, and solution-oriented group exercises. Participants shared insights, identified gaps, and proposed collaborative solutions to enhance service accessibility, program efficiency, and coordination mechanisms.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a qualitative thematic approach, integrating findings from multiple data sources to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, best practices, challenges, and service gaps while validating insights through triangulation of various data collection methods.

### Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

Data from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were transcribed, coded, and systematically analyzed using a thematic approach. A coding framework was developed to examine key themes, including access to basic services, legal and administrative barriers, effectiveness of support mechanisms, social integration challenges, and gaps in service provision. This process ensured a structured and comprehensive analysis, capturing the diverse experiences and perspectives of Afghan youth refugees and service providers.

### Service Mapping and Gap Analysis

The service mapping exercise provided a structural overview of available services, categorizing them based on:



- 
- Types of services offered
  - Accessibility and eligibility criteria for Afghan refugee youth
  - Coordination mechanisms between different service providers
- 

The analysis highlighted service gaps, duplicated services, barriers in accessibility, and potential areas for improvement, contributing to an informed assessment of the service provision.

### Triangulation and Validation

This study emphasized **method and source triangulation**. To ensure credibility and reliability, data from multiple sources are cross-checked for consistency and accuracy. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were analyzed to identify both shared themes and differing perspectives. Findings from the service mapping exercise are compared with insights from KIIs and validated through stakeholder discussions in round-table meetings.

### Interpretation of Findings

Following data analysis, the findings were synthesized into key thematic areas, highlighting challenges, service gaps, and opportunities for improving service provisions for Afghan refugee youth. The study identified patterns across data sources, ensuring that conclusions are based on consistent evidence. Emerging insights are contextualized within existing policies and service frameworks to assess their implications for refugee economic inclusion.

Additionally, the study translated these findings into practical recommendations, offering evidence-based strategies to improve service provision. This structured approach ensured that the analysis not only identifies barriers but also contributed to informed decision-making for future interventions.

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study prioritized ethical principles, confidentiality, and participant well-being throughout the qualitative data collection process. Clear informed consent procedures ensured that participants fully understand their rights, including the option to decline specific questions or withdraw at any stage. Strict security and privacy measures were in place to protect participants' identities, fostering a safe and respectful environment for open and interactive dialogue.

The data collection process adhered to the following core ethical principles:

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- **Informed Consent:**

Participants receive clear information about the study's purpose and voluntarily provide consent before engaging in data collection activities.

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- **Confidentiality and Data Protection:**

All personal data remain anonymized, and secure storage measures comply with national and international privacy standards.

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- **Gender Sensitivity and Inclusion:**

The study incorporates gender, age, and diversity considerations in sampling and data collection to ensure inclusivity and representativeness.

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- **Do No Harm Approach:**

Ethical safeguards guide interactions with vulnerable groups, ensuring that participation does not pose risks to their safety or well-being.

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- **Zero Tolerance for Misconduct:**

The study upholds the highest ethical standards, including a zero-tolerance policy for harassment, exploitation, and abuse.

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To ensure accessibility and participant safety, flexible data collection methods were implemented, including conducting interviews and discussions in secure locations. Special ethical protocols guide engagements with women, youth and other vulnerable groups, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment.

During the data analysis phase, all collected information was anonymized, and data storage followed strict security protocols to maintain confidentiality and compliance with international data protection regulations. These measures ensured that the study's findings were ethical, transparent, and actionable.

## 2.5 Limitations

While this study adopted the qualitative exploratory approach to assess services for Afghan refugee youth in Ankara, several limitations were considered:

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- **Self-Reporting Bias:**

The study relied on self-reported data, particularly in Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Participants might report dishonestly their experiences due to privacy concerns, in-kind/cash expectations, recall limitations, or social bias. Sensitive topics such as legal situations, gender norms, and informal work might influence responses.

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- **Language and Cultural Barriers:**

The research was conducted mostly in Turkish and Farsi and will be reported in English. Despite the benefit from professional translator and culturally sensitive researcher, nuances in meaning might not be fully captured. Cultural differences could affect how participants interpret questions and articulate their experiences.

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- **Evolving Policy and Socioeconomic Context:**

Refugee policies, economic dynamics, and service provision structures were subject to rapid changes. The findings reflected the situation at the time of data collection and might require periodic updates as policies and economic conditions shift.

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- **Time and Resource Constraints:**

The study was conducted within a defined timeframe and resource allocation, limiting the possibility of follow-up interviews or longitudinal assessments. While the methodology ensured a broad exploration of the topic, in-depth case studies or additional rounds of data collection might be necessary for a more granular analysis.

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Despite these limitations, the study's triangulated methodology, ethical safeguards, and engagement with multiple stakeholders strengthen the validity of the findings. The insights gained remain valuable for informing targeted interventions, improving service delivery, and shaping policy discussions in Ankara.

## 2.6 Expected Outcomes

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Afghan youth refugees' access to essential services in Ankara by identifying available services, barriers to access, and service gaps. The findings are expected to:

- 
- Offer an **updated service map** about essential services, including healthcare, education, legal assistance, psychosocial support and other social aid programs.
- 
- Highlight **challenges and accessibility issues** faced by Afghan refugee youth in obtaining necessary services.
- 
- Provide **evidence-based recommendations** for improving service coordination, policy interventions, and program design.
- 
- Facilitate **stakeholder collaboration** through round-table discussions, fostering a more inclusive and effective response to programs related refugee interventions.
- 

By generating actionable insights, the study seeks to inform future interventions and contribute to the development of a more responsive and effective service delivery system.



# 3

## Contextual Overview

Türkiye hosts one of the world's largest refugee populations, with approximately **3.2 million Syrians** under temporary protection and close to **222,000 refugees** and **asylum-seekers from other nationalities** including a significant number of Afghan refugees.

Türkiye hosts one of the world's largest refugee populations, with approximately 3.2 million Syrians under temporary protection and close to 222,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from other nationalities, including a significant number of Afghan refugees<sup>1</sup>. Over the years, Türkiye has experienced multiple waves of Afghan migration, notably in 1996 following the Taliban's capture of Kabul, in 2001 after the U.S.-led intervention, and in 2007 when Iran and Pakistan increased deportations of Afghan nationals. The most recent surge occurred in 2021 after the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan following the U.S. withdrawal. Many Afghan refugees arrive in Türkiye through irregular migration routes, driven by armed conflict, economic hardship, and the search for safety and family reunification<sup>2</sup>. Ankara, Türkiye's capital, is a key host city for Afghan refugees, alongside provinces such as İstanbul, Aksaray, Ankara, Konya, Nevşehir, Trabzon, Tokat, Çankırı, Kayseri, Erzurum, and Van.<sup>3</sup>

1 Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Türkiye, UNHCR. [unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey](https://unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey)

2 Ulutaş, Ç. Ü., & Topaloğlu, F. (2023). Türkiye'ye yönelen Afgan göçünü toplumsal cinsiyet gözlüğüyle okumak. *Mülkiye Dergisi*, 47(1), 170-197. [dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/mulkiye/issue/75768/1333318](https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/mulkiye/issue/75768/1333318)

3 IBC. (2022). Initial assessment of the current situation of Afghan refugees in Turkey. Retrieved from [relief-web.int/report/turkiye/initial-assessment-current-situation-afghan-refugees-turkey](https://relief-web.int/report/turkiye/initial-assessment-current-situation-afghan-refugees-turkey)

### 3.1 Legal & Policy Framework

Türkiye's legal and policy framework for Afghan refugees is shaped by its international commitments and national legislation, particularly **the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)**. As a party to **the 1951 Refugee Convention** and its **1967 Protocol**, Türkiye upholds international standards for refugee protection. However, it maintains a "geographical limitation", applying the Convention's provisions exclusively to individuals fleeing events in Europe. Consequently, non-European asylum seekers, including Afghans, are not granted full refugee status under this framework<sup>4</sup>.

To address the needs of non-European asylum seekers, Türkiye enacted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in April 2013<sup>5</sup> and established the Presidency of Migration Management. This comprehensive legislation outlines procedures for international protection, detailing the rights and obligations of applicants and overseeing migration and asylum matters via the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM).

Under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), Afghan nationals seeking asylum in Türkiye must apply for international protection by registering with the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM). Upon registration, they receive an International Protection Applicant Identity Document, valid for one year and renewable as needed. This document grants legal residence and access to rights and services during the assessment period. While the law aims to conclude applications within six months, the process can take longer. If approved, Afghan applicants are typically granted conditional refugee status, as Türkiye applies the 1951 Refugee Convention only to refugees who come from European Council member states. Conditional refugees are permitted to reside in Türkiye temporarily until they are resettled to a third country. While conditional refugees have access to healthcare, education, and other basic services, their stay in Türkiye is not permanent, and resettlement to a third country remains the primary long-term solution.

Under **the Work Permit Regulation on Applicants and International Protection on Beneficiaries** (Regulation No. 29695, April 2016)<sup>6</sup>, refugees under international protection in Türkiye can apply for a work permit six months after receiving their status. Applications must be submitted via the e-Devlet system, either by employers or, in the case of self-employment, by the refugees themselves. While refugees are exempt from work permits for seasonal agricultural and livestock husbandry sectors, they must obtain provincial governorate approval to benefit from this exemption. In other words, compared to other sectors where refugee

4 UNHCR, [www.unhcr.org/tr/en/kime-yardim-ediyoruz/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-tuerkiye?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/kime-yardim-ediyoruz/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-tuerkiye?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

5 Law on Foreigners and International Protection. 2013. [en.goc.gov.tr/lfip](http://en.goc.gov.tr/lfip)

6 Resmi Gazete Tarihi: 26.04.2016, Resmi Gazete Sayısı: 29695. Erişim: [www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/04/20160426-1.html](http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/04/20160426-1.html)

employment is common, agriculture and livestock husbandry have easier and faster procedures. *However, significant employment restrictions remain in place, including prohibitions on working in professions reserved exclusively for Turkish citizens and the requirement for ministerial approval if a refugee seeks employment outside their designated province of residence.*

A legal regulation particularly concerning Afghans in the livestock sector was introduced in May 2025. With the initiative of the Turkish Breeding Sheep and Goat Breeders' Association<sup>7</sup> and the arrangements of the relevant ministries (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security), even Afghans whose international protection application was rejected were targeted to participate in formal employment in Türkiye with a work permit. Therefore, this regulation might enable Afghan shepherds and their families, who face difficulties due to their status, to continue their lives in Türkiye with a work permit and a valid insurance. It also aims to meet Türkiye's urgent need for shepherds estimated at 150,000, while reducing unregistered employment.

Despite these legal provisions, Afghan refugees face significant challenges in accessing formal employment, with work permit approval rates remaining low. In 2023, only 6,204 Afghans received work permits, with 91.6% issued to men and just 8.4% to women<sup>8</sup>, highlighting severe gender disparities in labor market access. Bureaucratic hurdles, employer reluctance, and limited awareness of legal procedures further restrict Afghan refugees' participation in formal employment, pushing many into low-paid, insecure jobs without social protections. To address these challenges, Türkiye introduced new work permit regulations on October 1, 2024<sup>9</sup>, which include an employment quota requiring businesses to hire at least five Turkish citizens per foreign worker and exemptions for individuals who have legally resided in Türkiye for three of the past five years. In addition, restrictions on minimum wage to be paid to foreigners were updated and employers were allowed to pay the minimum wage for unskilled jobs (previously, foreigners not under temporary protection were entitled to at least double the minimum wage). Through this amendment, refugee employment was expected to be more flexible, especially for small size companies with a low number of employees.

# 6.204

Afghans  
received  
work  
permits



<sup>7</sup> Türkiye Damızlık Koyun Keçi Yetiştiricileri Birliği. (n.d.). Ana Sayfa. Retrieved June 27, 2025, from <http://turkiyekoyunkeci.org/tr/AnaSayfa>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Work Permit Statistics, 2023, [www.csgeb.gov.tr/istatistikler/calisma-hayati-istatistikleri/resmi-istatistik-programi/calisma-izin-istatistikleri/](http://www.csgeb.gov.tr/istatistikler/calisma-hayati-istatistikleri/resmi-istatistik-programi/calisma-izin-istatistikleri/)

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Security. Directorate General of International Labour Force. Work Permit. [live.csgeb.gov.tr/en/frequently-asked-questions/directorate-general-of-international-labour-force/work-permit/](http://live.csgeb.gov.tr/en/frequently-asked-questions/directorate-general-of-international-labour-force/work-permit/)

In summary, Türkiye continues to implement legislative and institutional reforms to align its asylum system with international standards, aiming to enhance access labor market, justice and protection for asylum seekers. **The LFIP provides a structured legal framework for Afghan refugees, granting access to protection and essential services. However, legislative, bureaucratic, and practical challenges in implementation continue to limit the effectiveness of these provisions.**

### 3.2 Service Landscape in Ankara

The service landscape for Afghan refugees in Ankara is shaped by a diverse range of governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations that provide essential services. **The mapping exercise identified 12 service providers operating across different sectors, including legal assistance, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), protection services, and education support.** However, significant gaps and limitations persist, particularly in service accessibility, coordination, and sustainability.



*Services for Afghans are very limited. Even if our IDs are active, there is nearly no support we can receive in Ankara.*

*KII with Community Leader*

Services provided to Afghan refugees are varied, but the most commonly provided services are protection, legal assistance and MHPSS in line with Afghans' needs. Organizations such as the Ankara Bar Association, DED, HRDF and SGDD-ASAM play a critical role in providing legal assistance, supporting refugees to navigate their way through asylum procedures, residence permits and legal protections. However, these services often struggle with limited funding and high demand, leading to long waiting times and accessibility issues.

MHPSS services provided by agencies including Turkish Red Crescent and Social Service Centers are crucial in addressing trauma and mental health issues among refugees. Despite their importance, access remains limited due to language barriers, transportation challenges and lack of culturally appropriate services. Furthermore, protection services are theoretically available, particularly for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), but bureaucratic barriers and stigma make access difficult.

The most visible challenges observed in the service landscape are duplication of services and lack of comprehensiveness. For example, legal aid is provided by multiple organizations, including the Ankara Bar Association, DED, HRDF and ASAM, leading to overlapping efforts but without broader coverage. The limited of cash support to cover litigation, filing and notary fees negatively affects the



effectiveness of these services. The study identified that complementary services in legal processes such as notary fees and legal file costs were provided only by TRC in Ankara. Meanwhile, some basic services such as higher education scholarship support, certified vocational training programs or job placement support are almost non-existent, limiting Afghan refugees' prospects for social and economic integration. Furthermore, while some initiatives such as Expertise France provide formal and informal education support through referring children and young people to apprenticeship courses and/or vocational high schools, a more structured, comprehensive and accessible framework is needed to ensure the long-term participation of Afghan children in education.

Some specialized services are provided only by a single organization, creating dependency and risk in case of reduced funding. For example, community-based social cohesion interventions are exclusively provided by DED and university scholarship program is only provided by UNHCR. Reliance on a limited number of actors for critical services can increase the vulnerabilities of refugee populations, especially when funding decreases. For instance, following the United States' "stop-to-work order" on foreign aid, the medical support provided by the YSYD and MUDEM, which responded to urgent needs was terminated. As a result, there is a service gap in medical support.

**In conclusion, while Ankara hosts a diverse range of service providers supporting Afghan refugees, significant challenges remain in terms of accessibility, efficiency and sustainability.**

Strengthening coordination and referral mechanisms, addressing service duplication and expanding existing underdeveloped services will be essential to improve the service environment and ensure that Afghan refugees have access to the support they need.

### 3.3 Latest Updates

**Recent developments in migration dynamics and humanitarian programs in Türkiye are affected by a combination of policy changes, geopolitical shifts, and socio-economic factors, significantly impacting both refugees and host communities.**

The Turkish government has intensified efforts to facilitate voluntary returns, implemented new registration limitations and repatriation programs while reinforcing border controls. Meanwhile, political changes in Syria, including the transition to a new government, have raised questions about the feasibility of large-scale refugee returns. Additionally, On January 24, 2025, the U.S. Government issued a "stop-to-work order" on existing foreign aid programs<sup>10</sup> and halted new aid initiatives. This directive, following President Trump's executive order to

<sup>10</sup> Pamuk, H., & Psalidakis, D. (2025, January 24). US issues broad freeze on foreign aid after Trump orders review. Reuters. Retrieved from [www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-pause-applies-all-foreign-aid-israel-egypt-get-waiver-says-state-dept-memo-2025-01-24/](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-pause-applies-all-foreign-aid-israel-egypt-get-waiver-says-state-dept-memo-2025-01-24/)

pause foreign development assistance for 90 days, has disrupted humanitarian assistance efforts, affecting service provision for refugees in Türkiye and other regions. Moreover, rising social tensions, as seen in the Kayseri and Altındağ (Ankara) incidents, highlight the growing strain between host communities and refugee populations, reflecting broader challenges in social cohesion and integration policies.

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, there has been a significant increase in the voluntary return of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Reports suggest that approximately 81,576 people have returned to Syria since the fall of the regime and that the trend of return will continue depending on developments in Syria<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the Turkish Government is allowing one person from each family 3 entry-exit permits between January 1 and July 1, 2025 to prepare for their return<sup>12</sup>. These trends and dynamics of return are expected to play a critical role in planning for service provision.

In January 2025, the U.S. State Department issued a “stop-to-work order”, pausing all existing foreign assistance programs, including those in Türkiye. This suspension has disrupted numerous humanitarian initiatives, affecting aid delivery to refugees and host communities. The sudden halt in funding has led to operational challenges for the agencies that provide services with these funds, and has cut off access to critical services for vulnerable refugee and host communities. For example; according to Global Health Council’s “Stop-Work Order Impact Report”<sup>13</sup>, 11 health service units providing maternal healthcare will be forced to close, leaving 28,900 people without access to care. This suspension has further exacerbated vulnerabilities among refugee and host communities, particularly affecting local civil society organizations and initiatives with limited capacity. Many of these organizations have been forced to scale down or cease operations entirely, resulting in significant service gaps and reduced access to essential support for refugees. Additionally, the strain on remaining humanitarian programs has decreased the effectiveness of other available funding sources, as the demand for assistance continues to grow. Addressing this critical funding gap is essential to preventing further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and ensuring the resilience of affected populations in Türkiye.

In August 2021, violent riots erupted in Ankara’s Altındağ district following reports that a Syrian refugee was involved in a stabbing incident. The unrest, exacerbated by xenophobic social media posts, led to attacks on the homes and businesses of Syrian and Afghan refugees, increasing fear and insecurity within these

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11 UNHCR. (2025, February). *Türkiye operational updates - February 2025*. ReliefWeb. Retrieved from [reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/unhcr-turkiye-operational-updates-february-2025](https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/unhcr-turkiye-operational-updates-february-2025)

12 Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). (2024, February). *İçişleri Bakanı Ali Yerlikaya: Gönüllü geri dönüş işlemlerinde randevu sistemi devreye alındı, sınır kapılarında 7/24 çalışma esasına geçildi*. Retrieved from [www.goc.gov.tr/icisleri-bakani-ali-yerlikaya-gonullu-geri-donus-islemlerinde-randevu-sistemi-devreye-alindi-sinir-kapilarinda-724-calisma-esasina-gecildi](https://www.goc.gov.tr/icisleri-bakani-ali-yerlikaya-gonullu-geri-donus-islemlerinde-randevu-sistemi-devreye-alindi-sinir-kapilarinda-724-calisma-esasina-gecildi)

13 Global Health Council. (2025, February 5). Stop-Work Order Impact Report. [globalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/GHC\\_IMPACT-REPORT\\_2.5.2025.pdf](https://globalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/GHC_IMPACT-REPORT_2.5.2025.pdf)

communities.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in July 2024, a major social tension erupted in Kayseri after news spread that a Syrian refugee had assaulted a young girl. The incident led to widespread anti-Syrian riots, injuring numerous people and causing extensive property damage to Syrian-owned businesses and vehicles. The riots quickly spread to other provinces such as Istanbul, Hatay and Izmir<sup>15</sup>. This increase in social tensions has also negatively impacted humanitarian efforts and hindered integration efforts between the host and refugee communities. Moreover, these social tensions have not only targeted Syrians, but also other refugee groups such as Afghans and Iraqis.

Although earlier, other noteworthy developments that have shaped the current dynamics include the “Investigative Decisions” and “the COVID-19 pandemic”. In 2019, Türkiye implemented “Investigative Decisions” (Tahkikat Kararları), introducing new procedures for examining refugee cases, particularly affecting Afghan and other non-Syrian applicants. These decisions led to an increase in rejections and deactivation of identities, leaving many in limbo and unable to access services. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further disrupted refugees’ access to public services and exacerbated socio-economic instability, disproportionately affecting undocumented and informally working refugees<sup>16</sup>.

**These recent developments highlight the increasing complexity of migration and humanitarian dynamics in Türkiye.** Closely monitoring these dynamics and accompanying developments closely will be critical for humanitarian operations to develop effective responses.

14 Al Jazeera. (2021, August 12). Anti-Syrian sentiment flares in Turkish capital after stabbing. Al Jazeera. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/12/anti-syrian-sentiment-flares-in-turkish-capital-after-stabbing](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/12/anti-syrian-sentiment-flares-in-turkish-capital-after-stabbing)

15 Al Jazeera. (2024, July 2). Protests and arrests as anti-Syrian riots rock Turkey. Al Jazeera. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/2/protests-and-arrests-as-anti-syrian-riots-rock-turkey](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/2/protests-and-arrests-as-anti-syrian-riots-rock-turkey)

16 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on Daily Life of Refugees in Turkey. [www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Daily-Life-of-Refugees-in-Turkey\\_.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Daily-Life-of-Refugees-in-Turkey_.pdf)



# 4

## Findings & Analysis

The Afghan community in Ankara, especially youth, face a complex situation in accessing services, benefiting from their effectiveness and achieving social and economic integration. Their experiences are shaped by legal frameworks, institutional capacities, service resources and broader societal dynamics, all of which affect their daily lives and long-term prospects. While various service providers offer some assistance, barriers such as legal constraints, language difficulties, bureaucratic obstacles and financial constraints continue to limit full access. Moreover, the effectiveness of these services varies depending on factors such as Afghans' awareness of these services and their capacity to respond to the specific needs of Afghan refugees. Beyond service provision, integration remains a multifaceted issue, encompassing employment opportunities, social cohesion and community acceptance. This section presents a detailed analysis of the data from the exploratory study, highlighting the findings and their implications for Afghan youth and community in Ankara.

### 4.1 Access to Services

#### 4.1.1 Legal and Administrative Barriers to Services

The accessibility of services for Afghan refugees in Ankara remains a critical issue shaped by legal frameworks, administrative obstacles, and the overall service delivery landscape. As explained in section 4.1. Legal & Policy Framework, while Türkiye has established a comprehensive protection system under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), Afghan refugees face significant structural and procedural challenges in effectively benefiting from these services.

Although Türkiye is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention, it maintains a geographical limitation, meaning only individuals from European Council member

states can be granted full refugee status. As a result, Afghan nationals cannot obtain full refugee status and are instead classified under “conditional refugee” status, which theoretically allows them to stay in Türkiye temporarily until they are resettled in a third country. However, in practice, as noted in KIIs, very few Afghans receive this status due to two primary reasons:

- The Turkish state increasingly perceives Afghan arrivals **as economic migrants** rather than asylum seekers, leading to systematic rejections of protection applications.
- The fact that most Afghan refugees transit through Iran before arriving in Türkiye makes them ineligible for international protection, as Türkiye considers Iran a “**safe third country**”.



*Previously, it was difficult to complete the initial registration. However, now initial registration works much better. However, following the status determination process after registration, most of the cases are rejected. There are two reasons for this: they are seen as economic migrants and they came through Iran.*

KII with UNHCR



*After fleeing the Taliban and internal conflicts, Afghans have also been subjected to very bad treatment in Iran. However, since they arrived through Iran (Iran is the first safe country), they fall into a legal gap even for a conditional refugee application in Türkiye.*

KII with IKGV

**Consequently, Afghan refugees in Türkiye remain in a prolonged state of legal uncertainty, which significantly impedes their access to essential services such as healthcare, shelter education, social assistance, and employment.** Many are left without formal legal status, making them vulnerable to exploitation, deportation, and social exclusion. As noted in KII with UNHCR, a rejected asylum application used to result in the deactivation of the refugee’s identity card (kimlik) and the closure of their access to the General Health Insurance (GSS) system. However, as a result of continued advocacy efforts, identity cards are still permitted for use in administrative procedures such as signing rental contracts. Nevertheless, these individuals still cannot access the basic services, as the card is considered “passive” within the service delivery system.

Furthermore, the study findings highlight that one of the greatest challenges for Afghan refugees is the prolonged and unpredictable nature of legal procedures.

Many applicants wait years for their international protection claims to be processed, during which they remain ineligible for crucial basic services. Even when legal pathways are available, bureaucratic procedures cause additional barriers. KIIs revealed that many Afghan refugees experience long waiting times for application and appeal processes, leaving them in uncertainty where they are unable to access basic services.



*We were hopeful when we applied for international protection. Our hope was to be resettled in one of the European countries. However, time made us realize that the temporary process was permanent. We started to experience the difficulties of this situation. The fact that our application process was not finalized always made us nervous. It took 7 years and we were rejected. It is difficult to explain this situation even to my children. Our children cannot think and plan their future.*

FGD with Afghan Male

Lack of awareness and bureaucratic resistance constitute additional barriers to service accessibility. Many Afghan refugees reported experiencing discriminatory treatment when attempting to access services. KIIs revealed that some service providers' lack awareness of the specific vulnerabilities Afghan refugees face, is leading to inconsistent application of regulations. These difficulties cause the challenges to especially access formal employment. Although they are legally eligible to apply for work permits, employers often refuse to facilitate this process, instead preferring to employ them informally under exploitative conditions.



*It is very difficult to access the labor market. Employers do not accept Afghan employees. Even if they need staff, they say to bring a work permit. Once I asked "how can I get a work permit?" Employers should get it for employees.*

FGD with Afghan Female



*Awareness of Afghans on legal issues is very limited. They do not apply for protection status when they arrive... Therefore, they are in need of professional support in these situations and application processes*

KII with DED

### 4.1.2 Access to Basic Services

**The exploratory study reveals that Afghan refugees in Ankara face systemic and unique challenges in accessing basic services such as education, health and social assistance.** As mentioned in section 4.1. Legal & Policy Framework, in Türkiye, Afghans under international protection and with a valid and active ID card can access basic services including education, health and social assistance, while Afghans who are not under international protection and whose ID card is inactive are excluded from all services. Despite having legal access to healthcare, education and social assistance in principle, Afghan refugees face significant challenges when they try to reach these services.

In healthcare, even those with active health insurance encounter difficulties, particularly regarding the high cost of treatment and medication. According to Law No. 5510 on Social Security and General Health Insurance, Turkish citizens who meet the relevant conditions and all refugees with status (applicant, refugee, subsidiary protection or conditional refugee, temporary protection) are covered by general health insurance and can access health services provided by the state<sup>17</sup>. Although health services are provided free of charge in hospitals, many Afghan refugees struggle to afford necessary medical procedures and long-term treatment. This means that while hospital treatment (and accompanying medicines) is free, medicines and other treatment fees are not covered by insurance. Under these circumstances, particularly Afghans with chronic illnesses pose a serious challenge, as humanitarian programs that once covered refugees' medical costs have been significantly reduced in recent years. Furthermore, according to the KII with the Social Services Center (SHM), "health measures" for Afghan children and women are implemented in accordance with Article 5/1-b of Law No. 5395 on the Child Protection Law and Article 1 and 4/1-a of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women. These provisions enable the adoption of protective and supportive measures such as facilitating access to healthcare, when health-related vulnerabilities or risks are identified among children and women under international or irregular protection. However, as mentioned in other KIIs, recent changes in policy have resulted in a sharp decline in the number of such decisions, leaving Afghan refugees, especially those with inactive IDs, without access to health services. Therefore, access to free health care has become impossible for Afghans without a valid and active ID in Türkiye.



*Now even pregnant women and children cannot access services. Previously, "health measures" were issued and access to health services was somehow provided. But now even most of those applications are rejected.*

*KII with Community Leader*

17 T.C. Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi, 5510 Sayılı Sosyal Sigortalar ve Genel Sağlık Sigortası Kanunu. [www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5510&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5](http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5510&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5)





*...However, there is a service gap regarding medicine support. Only medicines during a hospital stay are covered. If treatment continues at home or on an outpatient basis, medicines have to be paid for. This can cause “irreversible damage”. For example, a diabetic patient cannot take insulin and progresses to paralysis. A kidney patient cannot receive dialysis and loses a kidney.*

KII with UNHCR

In education, barriers are particularly pronounced at the secondary and university levels. While primary education is available for Afghan refugee children, many families struggle with economic constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and cultural factors that limit school attendance, particularly for girls. The high cost of university entrance exams for foreigners (YÖS) and limited scholarship opportunities for Afghan students make higher education inaccessible. The study identified only UNHCR’s DAFI scholarship program<sup>18</sup> as suitable for Afghan youth in Ankara. However, there is a gap in services to support their university entrance process and ensure their participation in the exam. Moreover, FGDs and KIIs revealed that many families prioritize work over education for their children due to financial insecurity, with young boys frequently pushed into informal employment rather than continuing their education life. For young women and girls, the situation is even more complex, as economic difficulties and social expectations of early marriage further restrict their access to education. In parallel to this, the KII with the community leader states that the high rate of non-education among Afghan children and youth increases their risk of being pushed into crime.



*Access to education is a big challenge for Afghans. Education ends when the identity card is deactivated. Children cannot go to school. Even if the identity card is active, it is very difficult for Afghan youth to access higher education. We want to study at university in Türkiye and to get good jobs. Even the exams are very expensive. There are no scholarship opportunities. There are both bureaucratic and economic obstacles to continue higher education. Therefore, we are left in an uncertain situation.*

FGD with Afghan Female

18 Global Compact on Refugees. (2020, March 10). DAFI Scholarship Programme – Opening Higher Education to Refugees. [globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/dafi-scholarship-programme-opening-higher-education-refugees](https://globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/dafi-scholarship-programme-opening-higher-education-refugees)



*A child whose identity has been deactivated or a child whose address has not been updated cannot go to school.... There are serious problems in children's access to education. Most probably, Afghans are the community with the highest out-of-school children rate.*

KII with TRC

In social assistance, there is a service gap with significant reductions in both government and non-government assistance. **While most municipal and government services only cover Turkish citizens, social assistance such as cash support and in-kind support for Afghans is almost non-existent.** Moreover, the recent reduction or complete withdrawal of key humanitarian programs exacerbates this problem. Previously, Afghan refugees meeting certain eligibility criteria benefited from cash assistance programs such as the Red Crescent Card (ESSN). However, the study finds that many Afghan families have had their assistance terminated without clear justification, leaving them without vital financial support. Similar reductions have been observed in food aid programs, with organizations such as Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), Deniz Feneri and ASAM scaling back or discontinuing direct assistance programs that previously helped Afghan refugees meet their basic needs. Additionally, the reduction of educational support programs, such as the distribution of school supplies and stationery assistance, has made it increasingly difficult for refugee children to continue their education. The reduction in humanitarian assistance and social support programs has increased the financial pressure on Afghan refugee households. This has contributed to worsening and multilayered poverty, where families not only face daily economic hardship, but also experience long-term deprivation in areas such as education, health, shelter and social mobility.



*No one asks us if we need anything. We go to the organizations and ask if they have any support and services. But now we always get a negative answer. Even food aid during Ramadan is no longer available.*

FGD with Afghan Female

Language barriers further exacerbate the difficulties faced by Afghan refugees in accessing basic services. Many do not speak Turkish, particularly those who are not of Turkmen origin, and struggle to navigate bureaucratic procedures due to the absence of structured language assistance mechanisms. While some non-governmental organizations including DED and public institutions provide translation services, these remain insufficient to meet the growing demand. The study also finds disparities in the availability of language support, as Afghan refugees

frequently report that while Arabic-speaking interpreters are available for Syrians under temporary protection, Farsi-speaking interpreters are rarely present in hospitals, provincial migration centers, other government institutions and other non-governmental organizations. **The lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services not only limits their access to essential assistance but also contributes to further marginalization and exclusion from main support mechanisms.**



*The language barrier is one of the biggest obstacles in accessing services. Because there are no Persian interpreters in institutions. Actually, there are some in hospitals, but very few. They are not available and we cannot get support."*

*FGD with Afghan Female*

#### 4.1.3 Gender-Specific Barriers for Afghan Women and Girls

The exploratory study further highlights the gender-specific challenges that Afghan women and girls face in accessing services in Ankara. **These challenges arise from systemic inequalities, cultural restrictions, economic dependency, and institutional gaps, all of which significantly limit their access to healthcare, education, employment, and protection mechanisms as well as participation in social life.** The intersection of legal status, social norms, and financial difficulties exacerbates vulnerabilities, leaving Afghan women and girls with fewer opportunities for self-sufficiency and integration.

One of the most critical issues reported during research is the lack of accessible healthcare for Afghan women, particularly in the areas of maternal, reproductive, and gynecological health. Many Afghan women do not possess health insurance, which prevents them from accessing routine check-ups, prenatal care, and essential treatments.



*Women suffering from menstrual cramps cannot even buy "painkillers". Since insurance is not available, they have to pay for all medicines themselves. But medicines are expensive and Afghan women and girls in financial difficulties cannot even access painkillers.*

*KII with Community Leader*

Even those who have active registration under international protection struggle with high out-of-pocket medical expenses, including the cost of medication, diag-

nostic tests, and specialist consultations. Participants in FGDs frequently mentioned that women are unable to obtain even basic medication for conditions such as menstrual pain or infections, and many delay seeking medical assistance due to financial constraints. This lack of access has serious long-term consequences, as untreated conditions can lead to complications during pregnancy, increased maternal mortality risks, and other severe health outcomes.

Education is another sector where gender-based inequalities are clearly visible. FGD discussions reveal that many Afghan families exclude girls from education even at the primary level due to financial constraints, security concerns and traditional gender roles. These inequalities are even more pronounced at the secondary education and university levels. Under current conditions, it is almost impossible for Afghan girls to continue higher education. This is because financially struggling families often choose to take their daughters out of school to reduce household expenses. In addition, many Afghan parents see early marriage as a mechanism to cope with economic challenges, leading to increased rates of child marriage among Afghan refugee girls. Participants in KIIs revealed that young Afghan women are often driven to marriage as a way to secure financial stability for their families. This permanently excludes Afghan young women and girls from educational opportunities and increases their vulnerability to domestic violence, social isolation and economic dependency.



*Maybe 80 percent of our Afghan participants have girls who do not go to school. Many of these girls are victims of gender-based violence. Even not only girls but also boys can be abused. GBV and other forms of violence are very common in the community. Traditional and cultural structures also have an impact. There is also the impact of limited opportunities. But it is very difficult to uncover this. Even more difficult is to be able to intervene.*

*KII with TRC*

The study also finds that unregistered economic activities affect Afghan women, making it difficult for them to secure stable and dignified employment. While many Afghan women express a desire to work and become financially independent, opportunities for female refugees are extremely limited. Employment barriers include language difficulties, lack of formal education, care responsibilities, and legal restrictions. Additionally, Afghan women who do find work often end up in exploitative, low-paying, and informal sectors, such as textile workshops, home-based piecework, or domestic labor, where they lack legal protections, social security, and workplace rights. During the research, several participants reported that women workers experience wage discrimination, sexual harassment, and unsafe working conditions, but fear of deportation prevents them from reporting abuses.



*Because employers know that Afghans cannot complain and are aware of the risks of being deported. This makes exploitation easier. In particular, we witnessed harassment and abuse of women and girls workers and physical violence against men and boys workers.*

*KII with Community Leader*

Moreover, for Afghan women experiencing gender-based violence or domestic violence, protection services remain largely inaccessible due to legal uncertainties and social stigma. KII participants noted that while shelters and protection mechanisms theoretically exist, Afghan refugee women face obstacles in accessing them. Many Afghan women are unaware of the existence of safe shelters or legal aid services, and even when they do attempt to seek support, bureaucratic processes, language barriers, and fear of repercussions from their families deter them from following through with applications. As a result, most cases of domestic violence and abuse remain unreported, leaving Afghan women trapped in cycles of violence and dependency.



*Since women had previously been subjected to violence, they could receive support from a center supported by UNHCR. I think it was called “Uçan Köy Poliklinik”. Now it is also closed. Afghan women have no safe place to go when they face violence.*

*FGD with Afghan Female*

Gender norms in Afghan society affect not only women and girls but also men, even if with different dynamics. FGDs with Afghan men revealed that cultural norms place men as the head of the household and cause significant psychological pressure on them when they are unable to fulfill this role due to economic hardship and limited employment opportunities. Several male participants, especially those without valid identity documents or legal status, reported feelings of hopelessness and distress.



*Women can walk outside more easily. But it is much more difficult for men to walk around on the streets and go to public institutions. The police stop men more often. They immediately transfer them to deportation centers. They don't even let you collect your documents.*

*FGD with Afghan Male*



Moreover, they expressed fear of participating in public life or even leaving their homes due to the risk of police control. The study found that men are more likely to be checked by law enforcement officials than women and those without documents are often sent directly to removal centers. This was reported to further cause them to feel insecure and socially isolated.

**In conclusion, gender-based barriers significantly hinder Afghan women and girls from accessing services, making them one of the most vulnerable groups within the refugee population.** The combination of legal restrictions, economic dependency, sociocultural pressures, and institutional gaps limits their ability to secure healthcare, education, employment, and protection. Without targeted interventions that address these gender-specific challenges, Afghan women will continue to experience deepening marginalization, exclusion, and increased vulnerability to exploitation. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive, gender-responsive policies, increased funding for women-centered support programs and dedicated efforts to ensure that Afghan women and girls can fully access their rights and opportunities in Türkiye.

## 4.2 Service Effectiveness

The effectiveness of available services was also explored in depth during the exploratory study, despite reduction in services due to funding cuts, cultural sensitivities and political dynamics. The effectiveness of services available to Afghan refugees in Ankara varies significantly across different sectors, with gaps in implementation, capacity constraints, and inconsistent service delivery being key challenges. While some public institutions, NGOs, and international organizations provide essential assistance, findings from KIIs and FGDs indicate that many services particularly related to legal aid, employment, health and social support fail to meet the needs of Afghan refugees due to structural inefficiencies, lack of coordination, and practical barriers. This section examines key areas of service effectiveness, highlighting institutional challenges, gaps in implementation and the impact of humanitarian interventions.

### 4.2.1 Effectiveness of Humanitarian Services

Legal aid and protection services are crucial for Afghan refugees, given the complexity of Türkiye's asylum obligations and the bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining legal status. However, findings indicate that legal aid services remain largely insufficient, underfunded, and difficult to access for Afghan refugees. Many Afghans require support in navigating asylum procedures, appealing rejected applications, and understanding their rights, yet very few receive adequate legal assistance. Furthermore, KIIs revealed that refugees who require legal support often face long wait times, unclear application procedures, and a lack of reliable legal resources. FGDs revealed that many Afghan refugees prefer informal networks—including community leaders and social media groups—rather than

official legal aid channels. This may be due to a lack of available legal aid, limited awareness or reduced trust in official legal aid opportunities. While non-governmental organizations such as DED, TRC, Ankara Bar Association or HRDF provide legal counseling for Afghan refugees in Ankara, the limited support for cost of critical needs during involving legal procedures negatively impacts the effectiveness of this meaningful service.



*Legal counseling and legal aid are meaningful support mechanisms. However, these also need to become holistic by covering costs such as notary fees. Only in this way cases can be filed and concrete steps can be taken. Therefore, these services should also include financial support.*

KII with UNHCR

Protection services, including psychosocial support, safe shelters and legal consultancy for vulnerable groups such as survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and unaccompanied minors, also lack effectiveness. While state-run shelters theoretically exist, Afghan women and children struggle to access them due to bureaucratic restrictions, language barrier, lack of awareness, and social stigma. It is reported that boys over the age of 13 cannot stay in these women's shelters, thereby depriving mothers with adolescent sons -who are victims of GBV- of access to this service. KIIs with humanitarian actors suggested that many Afghan women experiencing domestic violence do not report their situations because they fear legal repercussions due to their uncertain status and losing the income they need to sustain their lives. Regarding Psychosocial support (PSS) services, the study finds that existing PSS services are not fully accessible or effective for Afghan communities. The Social Services Centers (Sosyal Hizmet Merkezi - SHM) provide psychosocial support, but sessions are not available in Persian or Dari, significantly limiting their impact for Afghan refugees who struggle with the language barrier. Additionally, while the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) offers PSS programs, they are geographically distant from Afghan-populated neighborhoods, making it difficult for many refugees to access these services due to transportation costs and time constraints. FGDs highlighted that Afghan refugees often rely on informal community networks for emotional support rather than formal PSS services, indicating a gap in culturally and linguistically accessible mental health support.

In addition to legal aid and protection services, access to education support remains a critical challenge for Afghan children and youths. While education services are available in principle, Afghan children face barriers in practice. Many Afghan children struggle to enroll in schools due to administrative barriers, lack of documentation, stationery and language barriers. FGDs indicate that Afghan parents struggle to navigate the enrollment process and those with older children report cases where their children have been denied enrollment. In addition, many



refugee children face peer bullying and social exclusion in schools, which negatively affects their motivation to continue their education. For families, the cost of children's education is perceived as a complicating factor. While some NGOs have previously provided educational supports, including stationery kits, scholarships, Turkish language courses and catch-up programs, such services are now insufficient. The study reveals that there is a continued need for school enrollment, stationery support, scholarships and informal education in the education sector.



*Education support is very important. Both formal education and vocational training.... Afghan youth should be supported to study in Türkiye. Girls especially want to study in Türkiye.*

FGD with Afghan Female

Similarly, livelihoods assistance programs for Afghans remain limited in responding to their growing needs. Employment opportunities for Afghans in Ankara are limited to informal, low-paid and exploitative work in sectors such as construction, textiles and agriculture. Regarding the animal husbandry regulation mentioned in Section 4.1. Legal & Policy Framework, which has not yet reached widespread practice, requires to be supported with vocational trainings considering the transforming agricultural and animal husbandry technologies in order to turn it into an opportunity. However, due to the Saving Measures Circular<sup>19</sup> announced by the government of the Republic of Türkiye on May 17, 2024, there are some restrictions on vocational trainings provided by Public Education Centers. Furthermore, FGDs found that many Afghan refugees rely on unstable daily wages, making it difficult to achieve long-term financial stability. Women in particular face additional barriers, as cultural norms and care responsibilities further restrict employment opportunities. While some NGOs offer vocational training and skills development programs, the impact of these initiatives is often limited by legal restrictions on formal employment and limited job placement support.



*Vocational courses are important for women's employment, some courses are very suitable for Afghans but they require high school graduates. There is always a selection criteria.*

FGD with Afghan Female

The study underscores the urgent need to strengthen legal aid programs by ensuring faster process, clearer guidance on legal procedures, and increased ava-

19 T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. (2024, May 17). *Tasarruf tedbirleri ile ilgili 2024/7 sayılı Cumhurbaşkanlığı Genelgesi* [Resmî Gazete No. 32549]. Resmî Gazete. [www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2024/05/20240517-5.pdf](http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2024/05/20240517-5.pdf)



ilability of legal assistance for Afghan refugees facing protection and legal challenges. Additionally, there is a critical need to expand protection services and psychosocial support (PSS) services for Afghan refugees especially for at-risk individuals. Strengthening education access and improving livelihood opportunities through targeted interventions would also promote Afghan refugees' resilience and social inclusion within Türkiye.

#### 4.2.2 Coordination and Service Delivery

Coordination and cooperation between institutions are essential to providing Afghan refugees in Ankara with comprehensive and quality services. No single organization can meet all needs alone. Effective referral mechanisms are particularly important for services beyond the scope of ongoing projects. While key actors such as UNHCR and the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) play critical roles, stronger coordination and referral networks among all stakeholders are needed to ensure Afghan refugees can access the diverse services they require.



*Coordination and cooperation are important to provide better and quality services to Afghans. Because one institution cannot provide all services. The beneficiary needs to be referred to access different services.*

KII with DED

While institutional communication in Ankara is generally strong and referral pathways are functional, services specifically targeting Afghan communities remain very limited. Initiatives targeting Afghans are insufficient, with only a few actors offering targeted support, such as Dünya Evimiz Derneği (DED) and ARSA in other provinces of Türkiye. Therefore, disorganized service delivery and limited coordination among service providers remain significant barriers to effective service provision. The study reveals that government agencies, international organizations and local NGOs often provide assistance independently or coordinated only based on their relationship, leading to inefficiency, duplication of efforts and gaps in service delivery. Inadequate information sharing about services and the lack of service maps make it even more difficult for Afghan refugees to access existing services.



*We have good communication with other institutions, but it is not possible to talk about comprehensive coordination.*

KII with SHM

KII participants noted that although there is good communication between agencies, there was previously no formal coordination mechanism for services provided to Afghans in Ankara. To strengthen coordination among stakeholders, UNHCR has started to organize monthly thematic coordination meetings since 2025. This initiative was welcomed by service providers and is expected to improve the effectiveness of services by strengthening cooperation between key actors. While UNHCR's new coordination efforts are promising, bureaucratic complexity in Ankara continues to hinder effective cooperation. Much of the current interaction between agencies is based on personal relationships rather than systematic structures. This increases the risk of fragmentation of services and duplication of efforts.



*As of this year (2025), we took a step forward regarding coordination. We will organize monthly meetings with all stakeholders. Ankara is a challenging city for coordination. Bureaucratic processes sometimes make coordination very difficult and time-consuming.*

KII with UNHCR

Following this important step by UNHCR in coordination, service delivery and effective coordination became even more difficult, especially following the cut-off of US funding (BPRM) and the suspension of projects. The downsizing or closure of many NGOs that previously provided cash assistance, health services through medical support, individual legal counseling, food support and psychosocial services reduced the resources available to Afghan refugees. FGDs highlighted growing disappointment within the Afghan community, with many expressing concern that humanitarian organizations have largely stopped responding to their needs in recent years.

Consequently, improved coordination between government agencies, NGOs and international organizations is essential to enhance service effectiveness. **The study suggests that establishing clearer referral mechanisms, strengthening information-sharing platforms and enhancing inter-agency coordination could significantly improve service delivery for Afghan refugees.** Furthermore, advocacy to ensure that Afghan refugees' voices are heard and their needs are identified is crucial to increase humanitarian funding and provide vital assistance again.



*Advocacy support is very important. Our voice must be heard. Associations have a very important role.*

FGD with Afghan male

## 4.3 Social & Economic Integration

The social and economic integration of Afghan refugees in Ankara remains a pressing challenge shaped by structural barriers, legal uncertainties, and social attitudes. Afghan youth in particular encounter challenges in their efforts to live a steady and independent life due to their limited access to formal employment, education and social inclusion mechanisms. The findings from desk review, KIIs, FGDs and round RTMs highlight the complexities faced by Afghan refugees in social and economic integration.

### 4.3.1 Labor Market Challenges and Economic Participation

Afghan youth refugees in Ankara face a complex set of economic integration challenges that prevent them from building a stable life. **Limited access to formal employment is one of the major obstacles.** Despite legal provisions allowing refugees to apply for work permits if they have valid ID (international protection status) in Türkiye, **bureaucratic obstacles, sectoral dynamics and employer reluctance often force Afghans into informal labor markets.** Their exposure to informal employment increases their vulnerability to exploitation, low wages and insecure working conditions.

FGDs revealed that Afghans mostly seek support from social networks in their job seeking process. If there is a staff shortage in the workplace, Afghans inform their social network. Furthermore, Afghans are often employed in sectors where informal employment is widespread, such as construction, agriculture and textiles. Consequently, many Afghan men work under exploitative conditions, receiving wages below the legal minimum and lacking job security or social benefits. Women face additional barriers, including cultural norms, care responsibilities, and limited vocational training opportunities. Some Afghan women engage in home-based work such as tailoring and domestic labor, but earnings remain minimal. The lack of formal employment opportunities contributes to economic insecurity, making it difficult for Afghan families to achieve financial stability.



*Since Afghans mostly work uninsured and unregistered, there is no job security. They work in construction with high security risks and sometimes work accidents happen. But they don't even have money to cover their medical expenses. Also, employers sometimes exploit this and don't pay them. Every Afghan is surrounded by people who work and do not get paid.*

FGD with Afghan Female

While the exact results of the animal husbandry regulation mentioned in Section 4.1. Legal & Policy Framework are yet to be revealed, during the round table



meetings, it was revealed that it carries risks as well as opportunities. Although it is considered as an opportunity for Afghans who cannot access services due to inactive identity problem and whose international application is rejected, there are risks regarding the employee-employer relationship and the consequences of the termination of the employment contract.

Both KIIs and FGDs highlighted economic insecurity as a major source of stress for Afghan households and a reason for early participation of Afghan children into labor markets. Economic hardship forces many families not to prioritize education, and dropping out of school for work is widespread. **To promote economic inclusion, study participants advocated for the expansion of livelihood programs that integrate legal counseling for work permits, market-aligned vocational training and job placement support.**

#### 4.3.2 Social Inclusion & Community Relations

**Social integration of Afghan refugees in Ankara is hampered by language barriers, discrimination and limited interaction with the host community.** Afghan refugees in Türkiye sometimes face social exclusion and discrimination, which significantly affects their mental health and overall well-being. Furthermore, social integration challenges limit their mobility and access to social spaces<sup>20</sup>.

**The language barrier is one of the most obvious obstacles to social inclusion.** While Turkish language courses are available through public institutions and NGOs such as Turkish Red Crescent and Public Education Centers, many Afghan refugees struggle to access or complete them due to work obligations, care responsibilities, or a lack of awareness about available programs. This limited language proficiency contributes to social isolation and limits Afghan refugees' ability to engage with public institutions, pursue various job opportunities and participate in social life. FGDs revealed that Afghans who face language barriers in accessing services receive support from Turkish-speaking contacts in their community or receive translator assistance from NGOs such as DED.

The level of social inclusion varies among Afghan subgroups. For example, Turkmen Afghans tend to integrate more easily into Turkish society due to linguistic and cultural proximity. FGD with Afghan female group revealed that Turkmen Afghans are more likely to achieve social inclusion and find jobs in Turkish-owned enterprises. However, despite these advantages, Turkmen Afghans still face challenges related to legal status and long-term stability.

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20 Demir, Z., Vardar, S., & Yıldırım, A. (2023). Socio-cultural integration of Afghan refugees in Türkiye: The role of traumatic events, post-displacement stressors, and mental health. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 32, e20. [doi.org/10.1017/S2045796023000100](https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796023000100)



*There are Afghans who do not speak any language other than Farsi. They have difficulties in accessing services. They cannot tell their problems. In order to access services, they always go with someone in their circle or call on the phone and ask for support.*

FGD with Afghan Female

Furthermore, social exclusion or bullying among children in particular was also revealed during the study. Afghan children are often subjected to exclusion or bullying in schools, which reduces their motivation to attend school and negatively affects educational outcomes. Parents unfamiliar with complaint mechanisms and language barriers feel weak to address these issues, further distancing families from participation to formal education.

A notable trend among Afghan refugees is their reliance on and socialization within their own community networks. While kinship and neighborhood-based networks among Afghans provide critical emotional and practical support, they also contribute to segregation and limit interaction with host communities. Additionally, these non-professional support and coping mechanisms pose the risk of creating further problems, such as the spread of misinformation and inappropriate interventions.



*There is a contact number starting with 444 which is created for us. We reach UNHCR to ask for information. They tell us to look at their website, but the answers there are always standardized. We cannot access the information we need. Therefore, there is a lot of misinformation circulating or loss of rights due to incomplete information.*

FGD with Afghan Female

### 4.3.3 Pathways to Enhanced Integration

**Effective social and economic integration of Afghan refugees in Ankara requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach that addresses the interplay of legal, structural, economic and social barriers.** One of the most critical challenges to integration is the legal uncertainty that Afghan refugees face. This legal uncertainty negatively impacts meaningful integration efforts such as planning for the future, engaging in formal employment, and learning Turkish languages. The dynamic and complex nature of migration policy in Türkiye leads Afghan refugees to rely on informal networks and misinformation. As stated by the Migration Policy Institute (2022), the lack of long-term residency or pathways



to citizenship leaves Afghan youth in legal uncertainty, limiting their ability to plan for the future or fully integrate into society<sup>21</sup>. Addressing these legal and structural challenges is fundamental to promoting integration. Lacking a secure legal status and the necessary documentation to participate in society, Afghan youth are missing out on opportunities and increasing their social and economic vulnerability. Creating sustainable integration pathways requires policy reform at the national level, including long-term legal frameworks for residence options, facilitation of work permits and protection.

At the local level, community-based approaches appear to be an important opportunity to promote inclusion and resilience. Organizations such as Dünya Evimiz Derneği (DED) have an initiative focusing on youth engagement and social cohesion by establishing youth clubs for interaction between Afghan and Turkish youth. Additionally, the Altındağ Youth Center of the Ministry of Youth and Sports hosts various activities and hobby courses. These initiatives facilitate cultural exchange and dialogue. Participants in the FGD discussions characterized such initiatives as empowering, providing not only inclusion but also concrete support in overcoming daily challenges.



*I attend the Altındağ Youth Center, where I can benefit from various courses such as art, culture and language free of charge. Afghans, Turks and Syrians benefit from the activities at the youth centers together.*

*FGD with Afghan Female*

Beyond community-based efforts and structured legal interventions, humanitarian programs such as Turkish language courses and job placement programs are also essential to improve integration outcomes. As outlined in the Latest Update section, the cuts in humanitarian funding not only create gaps in the basic services Afghans need, but also limit I/NGOs' social integration efforts. Consequently, facilitating the effective integration of Afghan youth refugees in Ankara and improving their quality of life requires comprehensive program developments, policy measures and joint governmental, non-governmental and donor efforts.

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21 Migration Policy Institute. (2022). *The World's Leading Refugee Host: Turkey's Migration and Asylum Policies*. Retrieved from [www.migrationpolicy.org/article/turkey-migration-history](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/turkey-migration-history)

# 5

## Conclusions & Recommendations

The exploratory research on the Afghan population in Ankara reveals significant challenges that Afghan refugees, particularly women and girls, face in accessing essential services. A combination of legal, economic, and sociocultural barriers severely limits their opportunities and exacerbates their vulnerability. One of the most pressing issues is the restrictive legal framework, which prevents many from obtaining legal status, thereby limiting their access to education, healthcare, and employment. Without proper documentation, Afghan refugees remain in a precarious situation, often unable to benefit from public services or formal job opportunities.

Economic dependency further compounds these challenges, particularly for Afghan women, who are frequently unable to participate in the workforce due to a lack of work permits, childcare support, and societal constraints. Many Afghan households rely on informal labor, which is often exploitative and unstable. Additionally, cultural and social norms impose further restrictions, limiting Afghan women's mobility and access to essential services. These constraints contribute to their marginalization and deepen their dependence on male family members, reducing their ability to seek assistance independently.

Institutional inefficiencies and inadequate refugee support mechanisms also play a significant role in shaping the lived experiences of Afghan refugees. Many report difficulties in navigating bureaucratic processes, a lack of clear information on available resources, and language barriers that hinder their ability to communicate with service providers. The combined impact of these factors results in a cycle of exclusion, reinforcing socioeconomic disadvantages and creating long-term vulnerabilities.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that takes into account the specific needs of Afghan refugees, particularly those of women and children. Without targeted interventions, Afghan refugees in Ankara will continue to face significant obstacles that limit their potential for integration and self-sufficiency.





## Actionable Recommendations

Throughout the exploratory study, stakeholders actively contributed to identifying actionable recommendations aimed at addressing the key challenges faced by Afghan refugees in Ankara. These recommendations were gathered through KIIs and FGDs and later refined during roundtable meetings with relevant actors, including NGOs, international organizations, community leaders and public institutions. During these discussions, stakeholders assessed the feasibility of various recommendations, highlighting potential opportunities and constraints in implementation.

Initially, ensuring **continuity in service delivery** is critical, considering existing service provision and service gaps. This requires **securing funding flows and developing new resources** that can reduce financial setbacks due to international funding shortages. **Advocacy** may therefore play an important role in securing and increasing funding flows. Allowing the voice of the most vulnerable groups and evidence-based assessment of their needs through a variety of tools would contribute to the continuity of services as well as increased or more effective allocation of resources. Furthermore, it becomes even more important to **develop emergency response policies and exit strategies** that consider these resource-based current and potential constraints. In parallel, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive, up-to-date and publicly accessible **service map** to improve access, referrals, transparency and navigation across services.

Coordination between public institutions, municipalities, NGOs and UN agencies should be strengthened through structured referral mechanisms, regular coordination meetings, improved data sharing protocols and joint promotion strategies. **Supporting the coordination efforts** of key actors leading the initiative in this regard (e.g. UNHCR, Presidency of Migration Management) would contribute to improving the effectiveness of services. Following this, **strengthening local institutions** including municipalities, provincial directorates and local NGOs would increase cost-effectiveness and **facilitate mobile service delivery** models that reach the most vulnerable Afghans in Ankara.

The language barrier remains a key obstacle for Afghan refugees. **Recruitment and training of Farsi and Dari speaking staff** by service providers who can assist in accessing basic services would significantly improve accessibility and effectiveness of services. Similarly, service providers should **prioritize the hiring of trained female staff** to address gender-specific barriers faced by Afghan women and girls and ensure safe service access.

Efforts to **promote social cohesion**, particularly in service delivery for Afghan youth, would also be increased. Scaling up community-based programs such as youth clubs, peer support groups and intercultural events, and providing referrals to existing such programs would create safe spaces for Afghan and Turkish youth to interact, build trust and overcome prejudices. Moreover, access to edu-



cation and youth development still pose risks. Service providers should increase initiatives to **improve access to education** for out-of-school youth and working children through scholarship support, stationery kits distribution and flexible non-formal learning opportunities such as catch-up classes, Turkish language training and life skills training.

One of the most significant barriers to the self-sufficiency of Afghan refugees is their highly limited access to sustainable livelihoods. **Interventions targeting livelihoods** should be tailored to market demands, government policies and the skillsets of Afghans, and be designed with integrated protection components that consider the vulnerabilities of the target population. In addition, financial and technical support aimed at increasing employers' awareness and capacity should be incorporated into such interventions to enhance inclusion in formal employment.

Last but not least, future program designs and intervention plans targeting Afghan refugees in Ankara must **prioritize filling existing service gaps**. Lack of both basic and complementary services especially in the health sector must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, to enhance the effectiveness of services such as MHPSS, legal counseling, and shelter, **complementary assistance should be integrated** into programs, and participatory strategies should be developed to improve Afghan refugees' accessibility to these services.



The table below presents the final set of actionable recommendations, focusing on practical and targeted interventions that can enhance service accessibility, service effectiveness, economic inclusion, and social cohesion for Afghan refugees in Ankara.

**Table 4.** Recommendations

<b>1</b>	Increased advocacy to secure funding flows and development of emergency strategies to ensure service continuity.
<b>2</b>	Preparation of a comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date service map.
<b>3</b>	Maintaining strong communication and strengthen coordination (Referral Mechanisms, Coordination Meetings, Promotion of Services, Data Sharing Protocols, etc.). Supporting key stakeholders' coordination efforts.
<b>4</b>	Strengthening local institutions (municipality, governmental institutions, local NGO) to improve cost-effectiveness, advocacy, accessibility and mobile service models.
<b>5</b>	Recruiting and training Farsi-/Dari speaking staff to accompany staff to hospitals, migration authorities and social service centers to increase accessibility to services and eliminate language barriers.
<b>6</b>	Conducting comprehensive needs analyses in program designs and establishing effective monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms in intervention processes.
<b>7</b>	Increasing referrals to community-based social cohesion programs (e.g. youth clubs, solidarity groups, mixed cultural activities) and expanding these programs.
<b>8</b>	Identifying and expanding programs/funds with support for Afghan children and youth through scholarship opportunities, stationary kits and flexible non-formal learning opportunities such as catch-up classes, Turkish language courses and life skills training.
<b>9</b>	Expanding access to livelihoods opportunities through certified vocational training aligned with market needs, tailored protection-integrated job placement support and employer capacity building programs.
<b>10</b>	Prioritizing filling service gaps (especially in health services) and expanding the scope of existing services (MHPSS, Legal Assistance, Shelter, etc.) by including complementary assistance to increase their effectiveness in future program designs and response plans.

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