



UPINION

A practical guide to Syrian refugees' legal needs in Türkiye: Key insights for service providers and policymakers

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Key findings

This report presents key findings from a legal needs assessment conducted with Syrian refugees in Türkiye in October 2025. The assessment highlights critical gaps between the formal legal framework in Türkiye and the experiences of the refugee population, pointing to widespread legal precarity and barriers to accessing essential services.

Legal precarity and protection risks

- The vast majority of respondents (**91%**) hold temporary protection, i.e., *Kimlik*. Among them, most are scared of losing their status if they visit Syria (**80%**).
- Some had their legal status revoked due to bureaucratic challenges, change of residence, or arbitrary arrest.
- Most respondents struggled with restricted mobility and freedom of movement in Türkiye (**62%**). Protection risks also included the inability to receive aid or access support, among others.
- **29%** of respondents with children born in Türkiye reported their children had issues in accessing basic services including formal education, and routine healthcare and vaccinations.

Systemic exclusion from housing and financial services

- More than half of respondents reported facing housing market manipulation or inflated rental prices (**62%**) and neighborhood closures to new Kimlik registrations (**56%**).
- **31%** of respondents did not have a Turkish bank account, and the majority reported facing challenges in opening one (**66%**).
- The main obstacle was banks' demand for a work permit or passport, explicitly rejecting the Kimlik card. This financial exclusion hinders entrepreneurship among Syrian refugees.
- **24%** of respondents had paid social security premiums in Türkiye. However, almost all were not aware of a process to recover their contributions upon returning to Syria.

Lack of trust in justice mechanisms

- **36%** of respondents indicated having experienced or knowing someone who had experienced rights violations in Türkiye.
- The most frequently cited rights violations include arbitrary evictions, extreme rent increases, Kimlik cancellation or problems with registration, the threat of deportation or denial of fair trial rights.
- Deterrents to reporting violations included lack of trust and fear of institutional retaliation, as well as insufficient guidance on how to navigate the justice system.
- Nearly half of respondents (**49%**) were completely unaware of how to report rights violations or mistreatment.

Legal assistance

- The majority of respondents needed legal assistance but did not receive it. **66%** reported that they cannot afford legal representation in Türkiye and **31%** did not know the cost.
- The most needed legal assistance concerned housing and rent (**64%**), as well as work- and employment-related rights, e.g., work permits and unpaid wages (**59%**).
- Many Syrian refugees require advice on their future status (**56%**).
- Respondents favor a hybrid approach to legal assistance (**52%**), combining phone and in-person support, primarily in Arabic (**97%**).

Recommendations

Systemic reforms are necessary, including a mandate for financial inclusion of Syrian refugees under temporary protection. Moreover, low awareness of reporting mechanisms for rights violations and social security premium recovery must be addressed. This can be achieved, for example, through mass information campaigns. Legal assistance to Syrian refugees can prioritize housing and eviction defense, labor rights, as well as documentation and administrative law.

Introduction

The fall of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024 marked a major geopolitical shift, introducing new dynamics that directly impact the future and legal status of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. This changing context calls for a nuanced understanding of how Turkish legal protection mechanisms are evolving, as well as the most current legal needs and concerns facing Syrians as they navigate possible changes to their long-term prospects in the region. Understanding these challenges is crucial for ensuring the protection, dignity, and successful integration of Syrians residing in Türkiye.

This report, *A practical guide to Syrian refugees' legal needs in Türkiye: Key insights for service providers and policymakers*, is the result of a conversation hosted in October 2025 on Upinion's Digital Engagement Platform (DEP) with its panel of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. This conversation aimed to provide a detailed, evidence-based analysis of the legal needs, access to justice, and systemic barriers faced by Syrian refugees across various sectors, including protection, housing, financial inclusion, and labor rights.

The primary objective of this report is to identify the most urgent legal support requirements and to formulate targeted recommendations for both immediate legal assistance and long-term policy and systemic reform. The findings move beyond purely quantitative data to reveal the underlying structural issues—such as inconsistent implementation of regulations, lack of information, and the paralyzing fear of institutional retaliation—that undermine the fundamental rights of the Syrian population in Türkiye. The report aims to serve as a practical tool for governmental bodies, international organizations, and civil society actors working to enhance the legal security and resilience of Syrian refugees.

Methodology

Digital Engagement Platform

Upinion has developed an online platform that allows it to securely connect with marginalised or hard-to-reach communities, including people in crisis and displacement-affected countries. The DEP also enables Upinion to send tailored information to respondents about relevant services or initiatives in their area, thereby turning the conversation into an information exchange.¹

Representativeness

Findings are based on a conversation held through Upinion's DEP with 158 Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye and 28 who have permanently returned or have been deported to Syria. Most respondents were male (**68%**, n=176). Their age distribution was as follows: **5%** (n=176) were between 18 and 25, **27%** between 26 and 35, **44%** between 36 and 45, **12%** between 46 and 55, and **10%** between 56 and 65 years old. Only **3** respondents were older than 65 years.

Among those residing in Türkiye, most were in the Southeastern Anatolia Region (**32%**, n=158), the Marmara Region (**26%**), the Mediterranean Region (**22%**), and the Central Anatolia Region (**5%**). There were only **5** and **1** respondents from the Aegean Region and the Eastern Anatolia Region, respectively, and none from the Black Sea Region. While indicative of trends and patterns among refugee communities, findings derived from this conversation may not be generalizable to the population of all Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

¹ For more information on the recruitment of participants and Upinion's DEP, please contact info@upinion.com.

Main findings

Legal precarity

Syrian refugees under temporary protection in Türkiye may have their Kimlik revoked for a variety of reasons. They notably worry about losing their legal status if they visit Syria.

The majority of respondents in Türkiye (**91%**, n=157) were under temporary protection status, i.e., *Kimlik*. Some were undocumented (**3%**), international protection applicants (**3%**), and had residency permits, i.e., *Ikamet* (**2%**). Moreover, **2** respondents were in Türkiye with a work permit and **1** had acquired Turkish citizenship. Among those under temporary protection, **7%** (n=143) claimed theirs had been revoked. This was attributed to the absence of travel permits, bureaucratic challenges, changes of residence, and arbitrary arrests. Moreover, **80%** (n=133) of respondents under temporary protection reported being worried about losing their protection status in Türkiye if they visit Syria. In fact, Syrian refugees cannot travel to Syria without losing their *Kimlik*. While Türkiye allowed for temporary visits between the 1st of January and the 1st of July 2025, this measure has not been extended.²

Protection risks

Syrian refugees and their children in Türkiye may face multiple protection risks. As conditions in Syria are not yet conducive for a safe, voluntary, and dignified return, many intend to remain in Türkiye, emphasizing the need to maintain and expand investments in legal aid.

Respondents indicated facing multiple protection risks in Türkiye. Many struggled with restricted mobility and freedom of movement (**62%**, n=157) or reported an inability to receive aid or access support due to their legal status (**41%**). Moreover, **25%** reported restricted access to healthcare services and **25%** struggled obtaining a work permit. Protection concerns extend to Syrian refugees' children. In fact, among respondents with children born in Türkiye, **29%** (n=100) indicated their children face issues in accessing basic services including official social assistance and welfare programs, formal education, and routine healthcare and vaccinations.

While **15%** of respondents have permanently returned to Syria, the majority (**85%**, n=186) continue to reside in Türkiye. Among those who had not returned to Syria, only **5%** (n=157) planned to permanently return in the next 6 months. Almost half plan to stay in Türkiye (**48%**), while **17%** intend to relocate to a third country. Despite the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024,

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Temporary protection related matters*. <https://help.unhcr.org/turkiye/information-for-syrians/volrep/temporary-protection-related-matters/#~:text=In%20this%20case%2C%20your%20situation,the%20Turkish%20authorities%20at%20PDMMs> [accessed on 22 January 2026]

refugees in neighboring countries may not intend to return to Syria due to multiple structural barriers including safety and security concerns, lack of access to basic services, and limited employment and livelihood opportunities.³ **This emphasizes the need to maintain and expand investments in legal aid for Syrian refugees and their children born in Türkiye, ensuring their protection needs and human rights are met.**

Housing in Türkiye

Syrian refugees face financial and bureaucratic challenges in securing housing. They may be subject to high rent increases, evictions, or discrimination, and fear that changing residence can affect their legal status in Türkiye.

Respondents in Türkiye encountered multiple challenges in securing housing. Many (**62%**, n=156) indicated property owners manipulated the housing market for profit or reported facing inflated rental prices in areas hosting Syrian refugees. Moreover, **56%** reported that their search was restricted since many neighborhoods are closed to new Kimlik registrations. Other challenges concerned insufficient financial aid (**37%**), discrimination on the housing market (**35%**), limited access to affordable housing with basic amenities (**24%**), and the lack of housing policies for refugees (**22%**).

The Turkish legal framework for housing and residency



Under Turkish law, rent increases may be applied once per year at the end of the tenancy year, and the rate must follow the official inflation index. Landlords cannot legally impose additional increases within the same year. Similarly, eviction requires specific legal procedures; threatening immediate or arbitrary eviction is not permissible. Regarding residency procedures, changing one's address does not result in the suspension of legal status. Individuals can update their information through the Provincial Migration Administration Directorate in their province.

Despite this legal framework, some respondents reported that landlords imposed multiple or unusually high rent increases or threatened immediate eviction. Others indicated being pushed toward low-quality housing options, linking it to discrimination or limitations on registering in certain neighbourhoods. Moreover, a small number of respondents expressed fear that changing their residence could jeopardize their legal status. **These testimonies suggest gaps between the legal framework and refugees' experiences.**

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Enhanced Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria*, 2025.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/enhanced-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria-egypt-iraq-jordan-lebanon-september-2025>

Access to the banking system

Syrian refugees in Türkiye may face systemic exclusion from formal banking. This exacerbates their financial vulnerability and acts as a barrier to entrepreneurship.

Although **69%** (n=157) of respondents in Türkiye reported having a Turkish bank account, the majority (**66%**) faced challenges in opening one. The most frequently cited obstacle was the imposition of requirements that directly supersede or reject the core legal document held by refugees, i.e., the Kimlik card. For instance, some respondents were required to present work permits or proof of employment, while others reported that banks explicitly rejected the Kimlik card as insufficient primary identification, demanding a passport or formal residence permit instead.

Even when documentation criteria are met, Syrian refugees may be exposed to discrimination or demands for illicit payments. In fact, several respondents described being refused or treated dismissively by bank staff, encountering high cash deposit requirements or additional fees, and having to pay a broker or employee to facilitate the process. These testimonies point to inconsistencies in implementation and suggest that at least some Syrian refugees in Türkiye experience challenges that may not align with official procedures.

The refusal of banks to open accounts for Syrian refugees constitutes a barrier to entrepreneurship and may lead some to close their businesses. It also prevents them from accessing formal savings. **Overall, the exclusion of Syrian refugees from the formal banking system contributes to their economic instability and inability to transition from subsistence to financial stability.**

Social security premiums in Türkiye

There is a lack of awareness about the possibility of recovering social security premiums among Syrian refugees.

The rule on SGK Primi recovery



Social security premiums (*SGK Primi*) are mandatory payments required for working legally in Türkiye that function as both insurance and long-term savings. These payments guarantee access to health insurance and pension. Refugees who have paid SGK Primi may be eligible to recover these contributions if they return to their country of origin. This process, however, is neither straightforward nor widely known. More importantly, individuals must reach retirement age to submit a retrieval request.

24% (n=186) of all respondents had paid SGK Primi in Türkiye. Among them, only **3** respondents (n=44) were aware of a process that would allow them to recover their contributions upon returning to Syria but none were able to explain or describe it. These findings point to a major lack of awareness about the possibility of recovering social security premiums. Coupled with procedural complexity and age requirements, these barriers imply that **few Syrian refugees would recover contributions that may support them in reestablishing themselves and reintegrating in Syria.**

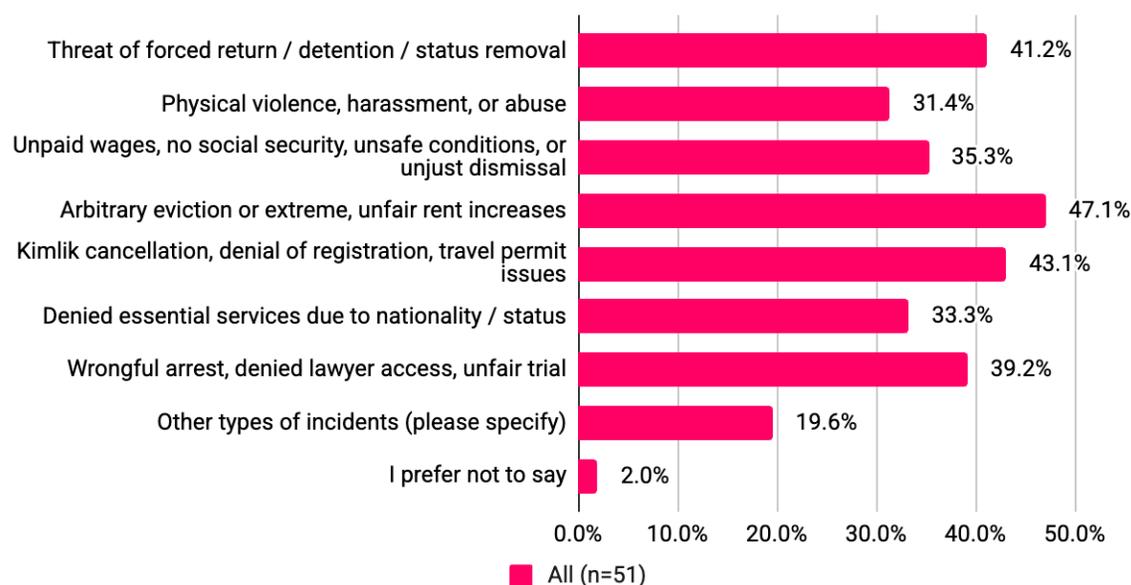
Rights violations and access to reporting mechanisms

Syrian refugees facing human rights violations may not report incidents due to fear of deportation and a lack of trust in the judiciary. Moreover, awareness of reporting mechanisms for rights violations and gender-based violence is low.

36% (n=157) of respondents in Türkiye indicated that they or someone they knew had ever experienced a situation in Türkiye where they felt their rights were not respected or upheld.⁴ Among them, **47%** (n=51) reported facing arbitrary eviction or extreme, unfair rent increases. **43%** experienced problems with Kimlik cancellation, denial of registration, or difficulties with travel permits. Another **41%** reported the threat of forced return, arbitrary detention, or loss of protection status, while **39%** dealt with wrongful arrests, the lack of access to a lawyer, or denial of fair trial rights. Other violations included physical violence, harassment or abuse, denial of access to basic services, e.g., healthcare and education, and employment-related violations including unpaid wages and unjust dismissal (Figure 1). **These findings indicate significant issues with housing security and economic exploitation, and highlight major systemic challenges related to legal status, documentation, and freedom of movement. They also underscore a critical need for legal interventions to safeguard Syrian refugees' fundamental right to protection and security.**

⁴ A substantial number of respondents preferred not to answer, reflecting the high sensitivity of the question and possibly a fear of disclosure.

Figure 1. Incidents faced by respondents who experienced rights violations.



Among respondents who reported facing a violation themselves (n=24), **11** did not report the incident through any mechanism including relevant Turkish authorities. Some respondents indicated that they refrained from reporting violations or pursuing legal claims in fear of institutional retaliation, including the risk of deportation. Other reasons included a lack of confidence in the justice system, and inadequate knowledge of reporting processes and mechanisms. These findings suggest that existing mechanisms may be ineffective, primarily due to a lack of trust and insufficient practical guidance on how to navigate the justice system.

Systemic challenges in the Turkish judicial system



These challenges reflect broader structural issues within the Turkish judiciary. Empirical research⁵ and international monitoring bodies⁶ indicate that Turkish citizens themselves often face impediments when pursuing legal claims due to the slow pace of trials or doubts about the impartiality of the judiciary, which may be exacerbated for refugees who face additional legal, linguistic, or social barriers. Respondents mentioned that they would be more comfortable reporting incidents with guarantees of protection and safety against institutional retaliation. Some also demanded fairness and dignity, as well as increased efficacy in managing cases.

⁵ International Commission of Jurists, *Turkey: The Judicial System in Peril*, 2016.

<https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Turkey-Judiciary-in-Peril-Publications-Reports-Fact-Findings-Mission-Reports-2016-ENG.pdf>

⁶ MLSA Turkey, *January 2026 – MLSA Fair Trial Monitoring Report*, 2026.

<https://www.mlsaturkey.com/en/january-2026-mlsa-fair-trial-monitoring-report>

Those who reported the incident primarily reached out to Turkish police or security forces and international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

Only **13%** (n=155) of respondents in Türkiye were fully aware of how to report violations, while **38%** were aware of some reporting mechanisms. Similarly, awareness of reporting mechanisms specific for gender-based violence was very low. This may partly underlie the observed number of unreported violations, highlighting a critical need for accessible information on the available means of reporting rights violations and gender-based violence.

Legal assistance in Türkiye

Most respondents did not receive legal assistance despite needing it, and the majority cannot afford legal representation in Türkiye.

66% (n=157) of respondents in Türkiye needed legal assistance but could not receive it. Most (**66%**, n=157) also reported that they could not afford legal representation in Türkiye, while **31%** stated that they did not know how much it costs. Only **4%** were aware of the costs of legal representation and could afford it. Their needs were related to temporary protection including registration, renewal, and province transfer (**36%**, n=104). This was followed closely by employment rights such as unpaid wages or unjust dismissal (**33%**).

Out of those who received legal assistance, **5** (n=19) respondents received it through a hired lawyer. **3** did so via each of pro bono legal counsel, non-governmental organizations, and family and friends, while **5** relied on other actors. Among them, only **8** (n=21) found it sufficient to resolve their problem, while **5** respondents found it partially helpful and **8** reported it was not helpful at all.

These findings highlight that Syrian refugees in Türkiye may not be able to afford, and subsequently, access legal assistance in Türkiye. Even among those who do, legal support may not be very helpful.

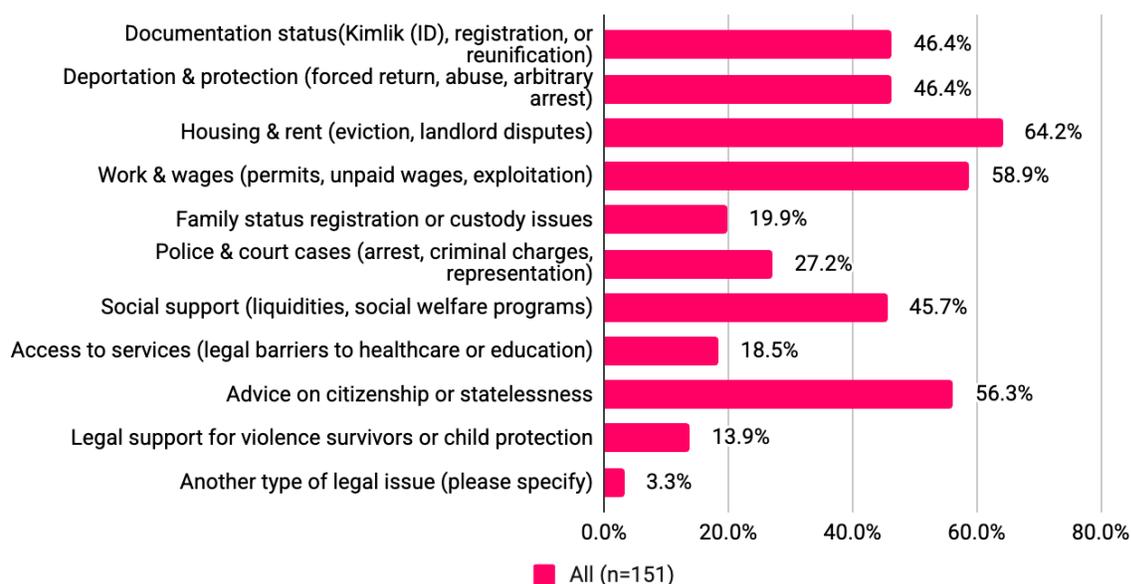
Most needed legal assistance

The Syrian community in Türkiye mostly requires legal support in housing, as well as work and employment rights. Syrian refugees also need guidance on pathways to citizenship.

The most needed legal assistance for the Syrian community in Türkiye was related to housing and rent (**64%**, n=151). This suggests a critical need for assistance with matters such as eviction defense, unfair rent increases, and resolving landlord disputes. **59%** of respondents reported a need for legal aid regarding work permits, unpaid wages, and employer exploitation. Finally, a

significant portion, **56%**, are seeking advice on their future status, highlighting a considerable demand for guidance on pathways to citizenship or addressing issues of statelessness. Issues of concern also included documentation, deportation, access to social services and welfare, among others (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Needed legal assistance by Syrian refugees in Türkiye.



Format of the legal assistance

Most Syrian refugees prefer to receive legal assistance in Arabic and through a combination of means, while some prefer phone and in-person consultations.

A clear preference for the hybrid approach is evident, with **52%** (n=152) of respondents favoring a flexible combination of legal support methods, customized to their specific needs. Traditional consultation methods are also desired, though less popular: **22%** prefer the convenience of scheduled phone consultations, while **17%** still opt for the more personal engagement of in-person consultations with a legal expert. The preferred languages were Arabic (**97%**, n=152), and for smaller groups, Turkish (**26%**) and English (**7%**).

Translation services and legal aid mechanisms in Türkiye



In Türkiye, refugees are entitled to legal support under the official legal aid framework. Language access is a key component of ensuring the right to a fair trial and effective participation in legal processes. The Union of Turkish Bar Associations (TBB/UTBA) provides a live translation hotline to support lawyers working within the legal aid mechanism, helping to overcome language barriers for clients who may not speak Turkish.

Recommendations

We recommend organizations providing legal assistance to Syrian refugees in Türkiye focus on housing and eviction defense, documentation and administrative law, and labor rights.

- **Housing and eviction defense:** Prioritize eviction defense and legal mediation to fight illegal rent hikes and resolve landlord disputes, thereby stabilizing the population's physical safety and Kimlik address security.
- **Documentation and administrative law:** Establish specialized legal clinics to address Kimlik status, registration cancellations, and difficulties with travel permits, which are foundational for accessing basic services. These should also support Syrian refugees subjected to unlawful deportation and arbitrary arrests.
- **Labor rights and SGK:** Develop specific legal support focused on unpaid wages, unjust dismissal, and obtaining proper social security registration, tackling the exploitation rampant in the informal labor market.

We recommend organizations advocating for the rights of Syrian refugees in Türkiye address access to the financial system, social security vulnerability, and conduct mass information campaigns on reporting mechanisms for rights violations.

- **Financial inclusion mandate:** Advocate for a standardized, clear policy that mandates banks to open basic accounts for all Kimlik holders without requiring a work permit or excessive financial deposits, eliminating systemic exclusion.
- **Addressing SGK vulnerability:** Investigate and clarify the true possibility and procedure for recovering social security premiums (SGK Primi) upon return. This is a critical asset protection need. A targeted information campaign can ensure that those eligible understand and, when appropriate, exercise their rights.
- **Mass information campaign:** Launch a targeted, accessible, multi-lingual information campaign to raise awareness of reporting mechanisms for violations and gender-based violence, focusing specifically on overcoming the fear of retaliation and building trust in anonymous channels.

Acknowledgements

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F4R is a coalition of Syrian, Turkish, and European civil society and refugee-led organizations working together to advance refugee protection, rights, and meaningful participation in Türkiye and beyond.



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