

Access to Health and Healthcare: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Historically, Turkey has been a significant transit and destination country for refugees and migrants from diverse countries. It currently hosts 3.424.237 Syrians (over half the total Syrian refugee population), providing free access to shelter, education, and healthcare. Syrians may receive treatment at any public hospital in the province where they are registered and emergency care in any of Turkey's 81 provinces. The government also allows non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to apply for permits to operate clinics that employ Syrian personnel, which alleviates pressures at public hospitals. Lately, the government has also adopted this system so Syrians can choose among public hospitals, customized NGO-run clinics, or government-run facilities tailored for Syrians.

Turkish citizens are required to pay social security premiums plus small treatment fees. Syrians receive all public medical services (primary, secondary, and tertiary) free of charge; costs are covered in full by a government agency (AFAD). Similarly, AFAD fully reimburses any pharmacy that provides medicine to Syrians. Syrians who visit private clinics pay for the services, but AFAD partially covers the costs. Effectiveness of refugee medical care at public hospitals is limited by language barriers and legal restriction to the province of registration. Mental health services are relatively weak due to insufficient number of Syrian practitioners.

The main challenge is sustainability; the model relies heavily on the Turkish economy to provide free healthcare to 3,4 million refugees. External funding sources exist but international burden-sharing is lacking. Aid is allocated on the basis of need and gets channeled to countries that provide fewer services. International NGOs may have difficulty meeting compliance and coordination requirements of Turkish law, resulting in a low number of such organisations registered and active in Turkey.