



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

المنظمة الدولية للهجرة

برنامج مساعدة الأسر السورية

Familienunterstützungsprogramm

Family Assistance Programme for Syrians

Funded by



Federal Foreign Office



IOM's Family Assistance Programme

Facilitated Migration Services

## IOM'S FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

### Background

With the Syrian conflict in its fifth year, Syrians currently constitute the largest refugee population in the world. It is estimated that over 13.5 million Syrians are in need of critical humanitarian assistance. Of this total, 6.6 million are internally displaced with an additional 4.8 million having fled to neighboring countries; Turkey currently hosts over 2.7 million Syrians, with Lebanon hosting over 1.2 million.

As the number of Syrians seeking protection shows no signs of abating, in addition to resettlement schemes, states continue to be called upon by the international community to offer additional safe and legal routes for Syrians to re-build their lives in third countries, including through family reunion visa schemes. Such schemes offer new beginnings and save lives by providing an alternative to unsafe, irregular and covert journeys, often facilitated by people smugglers.

Since 2015, according to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), nearly half a million Syrians have registered for asylum in Germany, of whom approximately 200,000 have already been granted refugee status and qualify for Germany's family reunion visa scheme. It is estimated that around the same number of family members will be eligible for reunification with a recognised refugee in Germany.

### Establishment of the IOM Family Assistance Programme

In June 2016, as a result of the unprecedented number of German family reunion visa applications being submitted to the German Consular Offices in Turkey and Lebanon, at the request of and funded by the German Federal Foreign

Office (GFFO), IOM established and operates three Family Assistance Programme (FAP) service centres in the cities of Istanbul, Gaziantep and Beirut. These service centres offer a wide range of support to Syrian families applying for a German family reunion (FR) visa. By providing administrative pre-screening of FR visa applications, German Consular Officers are able to make more informed decisions with complete information from the first instance.

### Family Friendly Facilities and Services in Arabic

The IOM service centres are situated in close proximity to the relevant German Consular Offices and public transport, and are capable of assisting in-person, a high-volume of Syrian families in a safe, empowering, migrant friendly, Arabic language environment. The sites are outfitted to international standards, offering comfortable waiting rooms, dedicated service desks, photo booths, call/contact centre facilities, integration classrooms, prayer rooms, as well as child care and child friendly play spaces.

All IOM staff have been carefully selected, security cleared and trained to provide empathetic and culturally sensitive services and to identify and prioritize the most vulnerable, including unaccompanied minors and those with medical conditions. To further assist Syrian families access the centres, IOM offers dedicated shuttle bus and escort services from the relevant German Consular Offices. IOM also has representatives posted at German Consular Offices to provide immediate support prior to interview.

## Information Services

A key component of the FAP is to provide Syrian families with accurate, timely and topical information on the German FR visa process and related matters, including relevant news from Germany, with a focus on integration related services being offered before and after arrival. Information is disseminated in the Arabic language via multiple channels including outreach by phone, helplines, email, website and social media platforms.

The IOM service centres share a dedicated Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/assistance.families/>) and Twitter account (@IOM\_FAP) to broaden outreach and access to information. IOM also monitors relevant social media to dispel rumors and misperceptions about the Germany family reunion process.

## FR Visa Application Completeness Checks

GFFO data indicates that the majority of Syrian families arrive for their long awaited German FR visa interview, unprepared and ill-informed, with most submitting incomplete applications, often lacking the required supporting documentation. This creates undesirable delays. IOM assists by providing comprehensive support to ensure that applications are complete prior to interview. Services include:

- Completion and printing of the required online visa application forms (see: <https://fap.diplo.de>);
- Visa application completeness checks;
- Facilitation of contact with recognised refugee sponsors in Germany (Skype, phone, email);
- Assistance with scheduling/re-scheduling visa interview appointments;
- Passport photos, printing, photocopying and translation referral assistance.

## Facilitation of Biometric Enrolment to Manage Identities

In select centres, IOM also receives applications and facilitates the enrolment of biometrics to further streamline visa processing.

## OBJECTIVES

- To dissuade Syrian families from seeking unsafe and irregular means to join their recognised refugee sponsor in Germany;
- To protect Syrian families from misinformation and exploitation by unscrupulous visa brokers;
- To empower Syrian families with Arabic language information and visa support services;
- To facilitate efficient visa processing with German Consular Offices;
- To better prepare Syrian families for arrival and integration into German society.

## Delivery of Integration Classes

IOM also provides voluntary, Arabic language integration classes free of charge, to better prepare Syrian families for their arrival and successful integration into German society. Specific objectives of the integration classes include:

- Providing participants with accurate and up to date information on the process of joining an approved family member granted asylum in Germany and what happens upon arrival;
- Living in Germany and developing realistic expectations;
- Rights and responsibilities and German law;
- Assisting participants to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful adaptation into German society.

An Arabic language handbook has also been developed in support of the integration classes and is distributed at all FAP service centres whether or not applicants choose to attend a class.

## IOM'S FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME - CONTACT DETAILS

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### IRAQ

Erbil (Opens December 2016)