



**MIGNEX Background Paper**

# **Migration-relevant policies in Turkey**

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**MIGNEX**

MIGNEX (Aligning Migration Management and the Migration-Development Nexus) is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners in Europe, Africa and Asia: the Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, the Overseas Development Institute, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

See [www.mignex.org](http://www.mignex.org).



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**MIGNEX Background Papers**

MIGNEX Background Papers are scientific papers containing the documentation and analyses that underpin the project results. Selected insights from background papers are also presented in non-technical form in other formats, including MIGNEX Policy Briefs and MIGNEX Reports.

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## **List of acronyms**

BİDEB	Directorate of Science Fellowships and Grant Programmes
CCTE	Conditional Cash Transfer for Education
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSO	civil society organisation
DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management
ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
EU	European Union
FRIT	Facility for Refugees in Turkey
GDP	gross domestic product
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	international protection
İŞKUR	Turkish Employment Agency
LFIP	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
MFLSS	Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services
PIKTES	Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System
RA	Readmission Agreement
R&D	research and development
SuTP	Syrians under Temporary Protection
TARAL	Turkish Research Area
TL	Turkish Lira
TP	temporary protection
TRC	Turkish Red Crescent
TÜBİTAK	Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
YTB	Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities

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## MIGNEX Background Paper

# MIGNEX policy review: Turkey

This paper presents the results of a policy review of the MIGNEX project in Turkey. It provides an overview of the key migration policies in Turkey and their interaction with development and development policies.

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Turkey's diaspora engagement policies have become more proactive in the last decade. Emigration rates for highly skilled individuals have accelerated in recent years and the Turkish government is taking actions to reverse this trend.

—  
Turkey has acted as a gatekeeper in managing transit migration into the EU but also uses this role as a foreign policy tool to gain leverage in its relations with the EU.

—  
Although one of the largest refugee recipients in the world, Turkey does not give official refugee status to asylum seekers outside of Europe.

## About the MIGNEX policy reviews

This is one of 10 MIGNEX Background Papers devoted to a review of policies in the 10 countries of origin and transit covered by the project. The term **policy** can refer to many different phenomena. MIGNEX adopts a broad perspective and regards policy to include the existence and effectiveness of particular laws, common practices, development initiatives, policy interventions and the broader policy environment or framework. This inclusive definition encompasses the needs of the project's overall research.

Much of the analysis in the review involves policies that relate directly to migration and its link to development. The concept of **migration-related policies** includes both the migration policy environment and interventions that seek to affect the development impacts of migration. It also includes policy and projects that might have large effects on migration dynamics, even if not presented under a migration heading.

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## Methodological note

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A systematic desk-based review was undertaken in November 2020–April 2021 to identify experts – on both migration and non-migration – to be interviewed. Overall, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 2020 and October 2021. All of the interviews were conducted online.

Dr Ayşen Üstübcü, Dr Nilay Kavur and Pınar Ensari conducted the interviews. At least two researchers were present for every interview. All interviews were conducted in Turkish. Prof. Dr Ahmet İçduygu and Dr Ayşen Üstübcü facilitated access to interviewees due to their established network among relevant policy-makers and experts. The central role of the Migration Research Centre at Koç University (MiReKoc) in migration research and dialogue between researchers, policy-makers, international organisations and civil society actors played a significant role in facilitating access to interviewees.

The period of analysis for the paper is 10 years, from 2011 to 2021; however, when relevant, explanations pertaining to earlier periods are also provided in the background. This period is selected because 2011 was a significant year for migration policies in Turkey that were already in the making since the early 2000s. Following the eruption of civil war in Syria in 2011, Turkey experienced a large influx of Syrian nationals and, by 2015, the country had become the largest recipient of refugees in the world.<sup>1</sup> This situation re-shaped Turkey's migration policy-making and cooperation with the European Union (EU) in terms of its reception of asylum seekers and management of transit migration. Diaspora engagement policies were also re-activated in 2010. While Turkey had an active labour emigration policy starting in the 1960s, until 2010, Turkey's diaspora policies were mainly reactive rather than proactive. The establishment of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) in 2010 marks a change in diaspora engagement policies.

## Summary of main results

Turkey has transformed from an emigration country into a country that experiences in-, out- and transit migration of various kinds with migrants of diverse nationalities. Emigration of a low-skilled, manual labour force that was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s transformed into emigration of a highly skilled labour force and students/researchers from the 1980s onwards. This trend is increasingly marked in the last decade as out-migration of highly skilled professionals and students became prominent. Despite the intensified efforts of Turkey to retain highly skilled professionals,

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Turkish officials refrain from using the term 'refugees' to refer to those seeking asylum in Turkey. However, while acknowledging the official legal terminology that is used in Turkey, we use the generic term 'refugees' in this paper to refer to forcibly displaced people seeking asylum such as Syrians under temporary protection (TP) and non-Syrians under international protection (IP).<sup>2</sup> See Üstübcü (2019) for an overview of the institutional and legal transformation of migration policies in Turkey.

the country has not yet developed a comprehensive scheme to encourage and support their return.

As the size of the diaspora has grown to 6.5 million individuals, Turkey's diaspora engagement policies have become more proactive in the last decade. The YTB was established in 2010 and has been placed at the centre of Turkey's diaspora policy. With the YTB, Turkey switched from a reactive to a proactive diaspora engagement policy. However, these policies are mostly shaped by political concerns rather than economic or rights-based ones, in an attempt to create a transnational Turkish community that shares the national political concerns of the current government and that would lobby for Turkish interests in their countries of residence.

Turkey is a key country at the periphery of Europe for transit migration. It has been a safe country to seek asylum for those fleeing conflict in the wider region, such as during the Iranian revolution, the Iran–Iraq war and the Gulf crisis, and has received irregular migrants with intentions to move on to European countries. Until the mid-1990s, transit migration was largely tolerated in Turkey. However, following the example set by the EU in the last few decades, Turkey has taken measures to curb smuggling activities, strengthening controls over the internal mobility of migrants and asylum seekers, increasing detention measures, and developing methods for the more efficient return of apprehended irregular migrants. Despite these changes, Turkey has been using transit migration as a political instrument for its own geopolitical aims, acting as a gatekeeper in managing transit migration into the EU and using this role as a foreign policy tool to gain leverage in its relations with the EU.

As of 2015, Turkey is one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world. This is as a result of large-scale displacement due to the war in Syria in addition to the influx of nearly 400,000 non-Syrian asylum seekers from the wider region. While Turkey is a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention (UNHCR, 2010), it is one of the few countries that still maintains geographical limitations on the implementation of the Convention. Accordingly, only asylum seekers from European countries can receive refugee status in Turkey. Currently, forcibly displaced Syrians are under temporary protection (TP) in Turkey, while the forcibly displaced non-Syrian population within Turkey are eligible to apply for international protection (IP).

Despite a 2016 regulation allowing Syrian and non-Syrian refugees to apply for work permits (Republic of Turkey, 2016), the number of issued work permits remains very low. Turkey also has lax visa policies enabling the entry and overstay of migrants from different nationalities. Hence, the majority of immigrants regardless of legal status are exploited within the informal labour market, mainly in sectors such as construction, textiles and agriculture. Large-scale projects such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) funded by the EU under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT) provides cash assistance for over 1.5 million refugees in Turkey. Although this programme has a large coverage, the amount of aid is rather modest and does not provide long-term solutions to enhance the livelihood of refugees.



# Emigration

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## Main policies

There are two key aspects that have historically driven emigration policies in Turkey. First, starting from the 1960s, Turkey has promoted the emigration of low-skilled labour, first to Europe, then after the 1970s to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries through bilateral labour recruitment agreements or contract-dependent labour schemes. Second, since the 1980s, Turkey has seen a rise in the emigration of skilled professionals and students. Turkey is developing policies to slow down the emigration of highly skilled individuals by encouraging return and so-called ‘brain circulation’, where countries of origin benefit through the knowledge and relationships gained from their skilled workers abroad.

In the 1960s, Turkey started exporting its surplus labour force abroad. This was done with certain domestic agendas in mind, which included alleviating unemployment, preventing possible socio-political tensions at home, enabling workers to gain skills abroad to secure a skilled labour force for development and, most importantly, benefiting from remittance inflows (as encompassed in the first five-year Development Plan (1963–1967) – see State Planning Organization, 1962). As such, during that time Turkey signed labour agreements with Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Sweden (Korfalı et al., 2014; De Bel-Air, 2016).

The 1973 oil crisis, which drove economic stagnation in Europe, led western European governments to halt the intake of regular migrants. However, migration towards Europe continued even after the official recruitment by western European countries stopped. Hence, a second phase of emigration began, marked by a shift from labour immigration to family reunification and clandestine labour migration (Korfalı et al., 2014; De Bel-Air, 2016), coupled with asylum seekers from different oppositional groups (communists, Islamists, Alevi and Kurdish nationalists) fleeing the military junta after the 1980s (İçduygu and Aksel, 2013).

In the 1970s, Turkey also embarked on a deliberate strategy to look for destinations other than Europe to export its surplus labour. So, from the 1990s onwards, Turkey shifted from a strong western-oriented direction to oil-exporting MENA countries, such as Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia, and to CIS countries also. Following this policy trend, the emigration of semi-skilled and low-skilled workers become predominantly project-tied, as workers were hired either by foreign or Turkish contracting firms. Although contract-based labour migration to CIS and Middle Eastern countries has constituted a large part of Turkish emigration in recent years, the number of workers sent abroad by the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) has dropped significantly in the last decade (İçduygu et al., 2017; İçduygu and Altıok, 2020).

Since the 1980s, Turkey has witnessed the emigration of its skilled and highly skilled labour force. Hence, there is a growing brain drain, due to the movement of scholars, university graduates and university students seeking study and job opportunities in the United States (US), Canada and Australia

(Kirişçi, 2008; Akçapar, 2009; İçduygu and Aksel, 2015; İçduygu, et al., 2017). Since 2015, the number of Turkish students going overseas for education has reached around 40,000 to 45,000 annually (İçduygu and Altıok, 2020). Additionally, highly skilled Turkish workers with experience in computing, finance and management in particular have been going to the US, Canada and Australia and to European countries, especially Germany (SOPEMI, 2003; 2005). The Turkish government has devised and implemented policies to prevent this brain drain (e.g., the 10th Development Plan (2014–2018) and the 11th Development Plan (2019–2023) – see Ministry of Development, 2014 and Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2019). More information on this brain drain is provided in the sections on Impacts on development and on Return migration.

## Trends

Turkey's current emigration policy no longer focuses on migrant labour for the purposes of internal economic development as it did in the 1960s. Overall labour emigration has declined, while at the same time it has become predominantly project-based, as workers are hired either by foreign or Turkish contracting firms. For instance, the bilateral agreement with Germany signed in 1991 stands out for its impact on emigration towards Germany, allowing companies there to co-operate with their Turkish partners to employ a Turkish workforce (Kafkas et al., 2014; İçduygu and Altıok, 2020).

These workers have been sent through the foreign employment programmes of İŞKUR. As of 2019, the top three destination countries for Turkish workers were Germany, Russia and Saudi Arabia (İçduygu and Altıok, 2020). Although there is still ongoing emigration of semi-skilled and skilled blue-collar labour, especially towards Russia and Iraq, overall, there has been a steady decline in the number of workers sent abroad by İŞKUR since 2012 (İçduygu and Aksel, 2018).

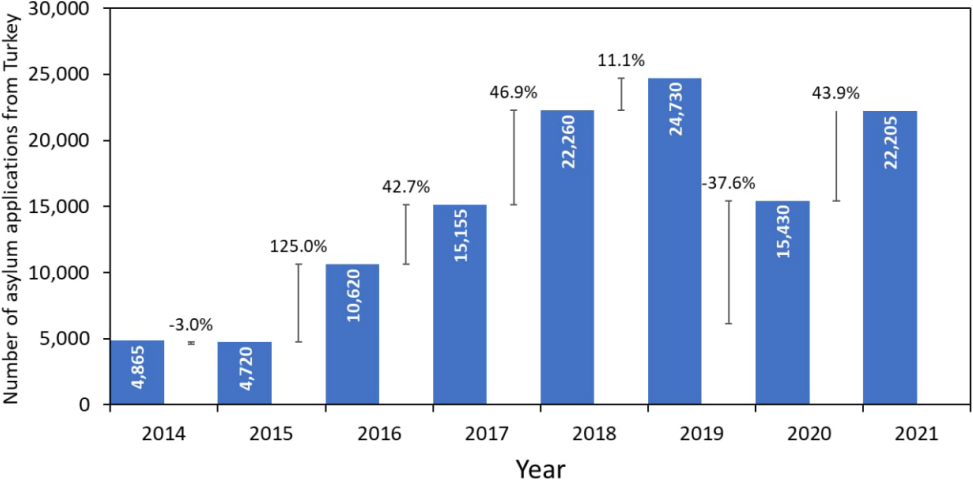
There are two other recent and crucial developments directly or indirectly impacting emigration policies: 1) the increase in emigration of the highly skilled, and 2) the rise in the number of asylum seekers from Turkey. These two developments have forced Turkey to take action, even though they cannot be considered as concrete policy trends.

Regarding emigration of the highly skilled, there are some incentives to encourage return, especially for academics. The policies implemented to counter this trend, by attracting highly qualified emigrants back to Turkey, are discussed in the section on Return migration. Second, the number of asylum seekers from Turkey has been rising since the failed coup attempt of July 2016. This was followed by large-scale purging of the military, police forces, the justice system and the education system, and also by the criminalisation of many non-state institutions including businesses and media outlets. In addition, more than 230,000 passports have been revoked by the authorities in order to control the movement of suspected opponents within Turkey and to limit the mobility of those already outside of the country (Freedom House, 2021). However, some passports have been returned (Reuters, 2018).

### Impacts on emigration

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As a result of the developments described above, the number of asylum applicants of Turkish origin, particularly to EU Member States, has increased drastically. Relatedly, there has been an increase in the number of Turkish nationals crossing the border irregularly (see Figure 1).

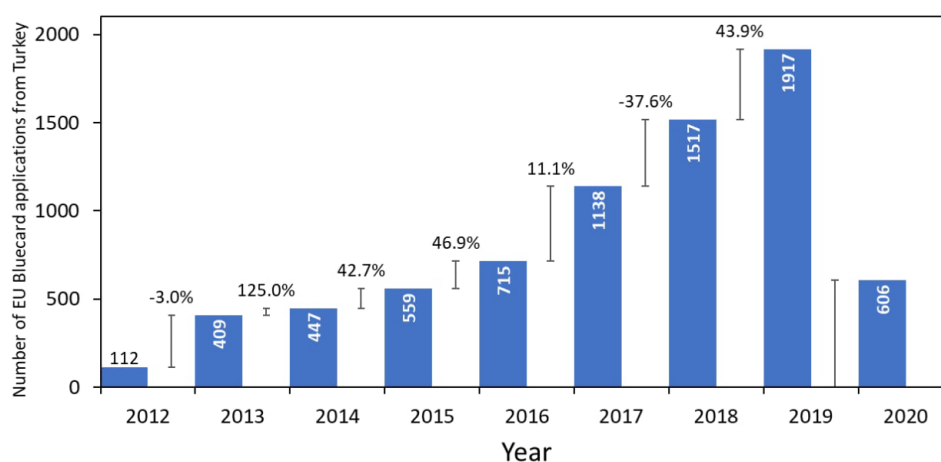


**Figure 1. Number of asylum applications from Turkey**

Source: Compiled from Eurostat (2022a).

According to a Frontex Risk Analysis report (Frontex, 2022), Turkish nationals (n=394) were the third most detected at the EU’s external borders in 2020.

Political and financial instability has also led to the emigration of the highly skilled population. Turkey has a Freedom House Index score of 32 out of 100 and is categorised as ‘not free’ (Freedom House (n.d.)). There are also additional factors that both push and pull the highly skilled, such as Turkey’s very evident low wages and long work hours, coupled with a gender pay gap (Güngör and Tansel, 2014; Elveren and Toksöz, 2019) and the demand for a highly skilled workforce with competitive wages abroad. According to Eurostat (2021) data on EU Blue Cards, an increasing number of Turkish citizens have acquired Blue Cards from different EU countries, which allows highly skilled non-EU citizens to work and live in 25 of the 27 EU Member States (see Figure 2).



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**Figure 2. EU Blue Card applications from Turkey**

Source: Compiled from Eurostat (2021).

## Impacts on development

Turkey's development has been directly impacted by emigration, especially through remittances from abroad and brain drain. Between the 1960s and 1990s, remittances were a significant contributor to Turkey's economy, especially in terms of compensating shortages in foreign currency to pay for imported goods and services, and in supporting development projects (İçduygu, 2014a). Turkey's development-based emigration policy of exporting surplus labour has resulted in the growth of remittances. State policies played a key role to support local and national development through remittances (Aksel, 2019). Between 1950 and 1980, the Turkish economy was characterised by state-guided industrialisation based on import substitution. In this context, the inflow of remittances led to economic growth, as recipient households built human capital through education and health expenses. This, in turn, created a multiplier effect as consumption and investments increased. Much of the remittance inflows went directly to migrants' families or local communities, hence having a positive impact on household welfare (Koç and Onan, 2004). The Central Bank Remittance Account was introduced in 1976. In the following decades, this generated a foreign currency reserve for the Central Bank, especially during economic transitions and downturns.

Starting from the 1980s, Turkey adopted a liberal economy with an export-led growth policy (Korfalı et al., 2014), which reduced the centrality of remittances in fiscal and development policies. There are structural, institutional and social reasons behind the declining number and total value of remittances in the official statistics. The liberalisation of Turkey's economy and the increasing importance of tourism and foreign direct investment (FDI), coupled with emigrants' weakening ties with Turkey from the 1990s (İçduygu and Altıok, 2020), led to a dramatic decrease in the volume of remittances. The financial crisis between 1999 and 2001 is also considered to be a contributory factor in the decline (Karamelikli and Bayar,

2015), as the Turkish economy no longer presented attractive investment opportunities for Turkish emigrants (İçduygu and Altıok, 2020; Meyer, 2020). Furthermore, statistics show an additional decline after 2003 when the Central Bank of Turkey excluded foreign exchange accounts and money spent on travel to Turkey from its classification of workers' remittances. Similarly, decreased interest rates and increased tax on remittances resulted in further decline (Meyer, 2020).

Elitok et al. (2012) suggested that during and after Turkey's financial crisis in 2000, informal ways of remitting started to become more common. Furthermore, as sending money through banks became costly due to transfer fees and improved travel infrastructure made emigrants' visits to Turkey easier and cheaper, some emigrants began preferring to carry money with them thus excluding such transactions from official records (Meyer, 2020). Estimates about the volume of informal remittances to Turkey differ considerably, from 35% to 250% of formal remittances (Social Science Research Council, 2009). As one expert confirmed, the true total is unknown.

While the amount of remittance inflows, as recorded by the Central Bank, was US\$1.05 billion in 2011 (0.13% of gross domestic product (GDP)), it fell to US\$184 million in 2019 (0.02% of GDP, 0.5% of the trade deficit) (Central Bank of Turkey, TURKSTAT, cited in İçduygu and Altıok, 2020). In this regard, the Turkish government's disinterest in remittances and the decline in their total value may be a mutually reinforcing relationship, leading to the closing down of the Central Bank Remittance Account in 2014.

Today, the dominant trend has been shaped by attempts to channel remittances into investments (İçduygu and Aksel, 2015). Investing in joint ventures, such as shopping malls, is expected from diaspora members. As stated by an expert on the diaspora, the Turkish state does not have separate incentives for diaspora investments, but generally encourages FDI by making the investment environment in Turkey more attractive.

Emigration of skilled labour is generally conceived as a significant socioeconomic loss for the country, considering Turkey's need for a skilled labour force and for investments creating surplus value (Oğuzkan, 1971; Dorsay, 1977; and Göker, 1982, all cited in Gökbayrak, 2009; Elveren and Toksöz, 2019). The loss of skilled human resources has intensified especially in the last decade. As an example, the emigration of Turkish doctors has increased significantly, from only 59 in 2012, to 1,047 in 2019 and 931 in 2020 (Independent Türkçe, 2021). Similarly, recent media coverage indicates that computer engineering graduates and IT specialists are more likely to emigrate for better living conditions (T24, 2022).

Even though emigration of highly skilled migrants is regarded as a loss, there are some positive effects on development. For example, some Turkish associations send remittances, which are used to finance community projects such as hospitals and schools and may reduce poverty and promote development in certain areas (Akçapar, 2009). As such, highly skilled emigration from Turkey has a mixture of benefits and costs (İçduygu, 2014a).

## Key incoherence across policies

Turkey has made efforts to reverse the emigration of highly skilled Turkish nationals and to encourage brain circulation, as elaborated in the section on Return migration. However, these efforts, developed particularly for the return of academics, remain insufficient and inefficient considering the overall economic and political developments in the country. The current economic instability and existing labour market structure in Turkey are not suitable to reintegrate returning academics or other professionals. This incoherence is further elaborated in the Return migration section as well.

The closure of the Central Bank's remittance accounts in 2014 can be regarded as a decision that has reinforced the decline of remittances, which once contributed to the Turkish GDP substantially (T24, 2014). In 2022, however, the Central Bank reversed its decision, enabling all banks in Turkey to re-open remittance accounts named *Yuvam* ('My home') (Central Bank, 2022), as part of financial measures to stop Turkish lira (TL) from losing value against the US dollar.

## Interaction with development policies

As emigration patterns have changed over the decades, Turkey's development policies are no longer tied to remittances sent by Turkish workers abroad. With most recent emigrants being highly skilled professionals and post-graduate students, Turkey's development policies, as outlined in the recent five-year Development Plans, are geared towards retaining the qualified workforce by improving living and working conditions. Additionally, benefiting from the scientific skill sets and expertise of Turkish emigrants is one of the policy areas of the 11th Development Plan (2019–2023) (Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2019) which outlines the establishment of a mechanism through which laboratory infrastructure and research funds will be provided to leading Turkish scientists abroad. This policy aims to enable and encourage part-time training and research activities in Turkey. This is further elaborated in the section on Return migration. However, as stated above, Turkey's economic instability and existing market structure stand as obstacles for these policies.

## Diaspora

### Main policies

Over 6.5 million Turkish nationals live abroad, according to the YTB. Approximately 5.5 million Turkish citizens live in western European countries (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020a). Germany, which hosts 3.4 million Turkish diaspora members, has the highest number of Turkish citizens living abroad (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020b). Given the sizeable population of the Turkish diaspora, the Turkish state is carrying out proactive policies to maintain its ties with the diaspora communities (İçduygu, 2014b; De Bel-Air, 2016). This is especially the case since the establishment of the YTB in 2010.

In earlier periods after the 1960s, most policies focused on the social rights of workers abroad and their eventual return. Since the late 1970s, particular laws have been enacted with the explicit purpose of strengthening connections between workers abroad and their homeland of Turkey. For instance, based on the Social Security Act (Law no.2147) passed in 1978, Turkish citizens abroad are allowed to benefit from social security rights in Turkey. Despite some current problems regarding implementation, these migrants can either transfer their working days abroad or pay Social Security Insurance (SSI) premiums towards their pensions in Turkey (SOPEMI, 1978). Another set of policies focused on the social and cultural needs of workers abroad as well as their families. For instance, in the early 1970s, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, hereinafter *Diyanet*) started to send imams and religious delegates abroad. (Mencütek and Başer, 2018). In the 1980s, teachers were sent by the Ministry of Education to provide Turkish language and history education to children of emigrants abroad (İçduygu and Aksel, 2013).

Turkey has recognised the right to dual citizenship for Turkish citizens since 1981. However, migrant-receiving countries might not allow for dual citizenship. As such, in 1995, the Turkish Citizenship Law (Republic of Turkey, 1964) was amended to address this problem. Turkish emigrants abroad are now required to inform the authorities when they renounce their Turkish citizenship to receive another in case the country of residence granting citizenship does not allow dual citizenship. In such cases, the Blue Card, formerly named the Pink Card until 2004, provides privileged non-citizen status to those who have had to give up Turkish nationality to acquire new citizenship. Holders cannot vote in local and national elections in Turkey, but they can enjoy social and economic rights, such as residence, and the right to acquire property, inherit assets, operate businesses and to work like any other Turkish citizen (SOPEMI, 1997; 1999; Akçapar and Aksel, 2017; Mencütek and Başer, 2018). According to one expert, the goal of the Blue Card programme is to allow the Turkish diaspora to maintain their social and economic ties with Turkey and to provide easy access to services.

## Trends

In the last 10 years, Turkey's engagement with its diaspora population has intensified. To accelerate diaspora engagement, the number of Turkish foreign missions has risen from 163 in 2002 to 236 as of 2017, covering 135 embassies and 86 consulates as well as permanent delegations and trade offices (Akçapar and Aksel, 2017).

More importantly, the YTB was established in 2010 and has been placed at the centre of Turkey's diaspora policy (Akçapar and Aksel, 2017; Adamson, 2019). With the YTB, Turkey switched from a reactive to a proactive diaspora engagement policy. However, as stated by an expert in the field, these policies are mostly shaped by political concerns rather than economic ones, attempting to create a transnational Turkish community that shares the national political concerns of the current government and that would lobby for Turkish interests in their countries of residence. According to an expert, since half of the diaspora population lives in Germany, the YTB's activities are mostly focused there. The first two generations of migrants to Germany still have close relations with Turkey; however, their grandchildren have less

so. This newer generation is less connected to Turkey, having spent little time there nor do they in general speak Turkish fluently. As such, the youth of the diaspora community lie at the centre of the YTB's diaspora engagement policy (YTB, n.d.).

The YTB cooperates with foreign missions with respect to the activities and programmes organised outside Turkey (Akçapar and Aksel, 2017). It has also provided financial assistance to civil society organisations (CSOs), universities, international organisations, think tanks and research centres since 2011 (ibid.). The department of Citizens Abroad, a unit within the YTB, works in 15 countries which host Turkish diaspora members. This department visits at least 10 of these countries every year and directly contacts 700 CSOs to discuss their problems and expectations. A large proportion of Turkish CSOs abroad are mosque associations. By 2013, more than 1,000 mosque associations in Germany were affiliated with the *Diyanet*, constituting the largest Turkish diaspora organisation (Ünver, 2013). Additionally, *Diyanet* started new initiatives to reach the newer generation of the Turkish diaspora. These include the foundation of the Faculty of Theology in Strasbourg to provide high-level education of Islamic theology for young generations of Turkish diaspora and the establishment of two Islamic Universities in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (Akçapar and Aksel, 2017).

The YTB also has a funding programme on topics such as family and youth, and on Turkish language and culture, with CSOs applying to receive funding for their projects. One expert stated that examples of these projects include, but are not limited to, Turkish courses and travel programmes organised across Turkey for youth living abroad. In 2020, 306 CSO projects were supported as part of this funding programme.

There are several institutions connected to the YTB that have been established for a variety of functions, including but not limited to cultural promotion, economic interests, humanitarian development, public diplomacy and the boosting of Turkey's image (Akçapar and Aksel, 2017). The Yunus Emre Institute (2007) and the Office of Public Diplomacy (the Directorate of Communications since 2018) are two such examples. The Yunus Emre Institute conducts cultural diplomacy activities and promotes the Turkish language and culture abroad through 54 cultural centres operating in 43 countries (Arkılıç, 2020).

Moreover, the YTB offers assistance to Turkish organisations to enhance their political representation and to forge closer relations to Turkey (Aydın, 2014). However, according to one expert, weak networking among the diaspora community makes it difficult for the YTB to disseminate news about new projects, programmes and grants, and to reach target groups and networks.

As for the right to vote, Turkish parliament passed a law in 2012 facilitating the voting process for citizens residing abroad in general elections and referendums and allowing them to cast their votes in Turkish consulates in their country of residence (Kadirbeyoğlu, 2012). Accordingly, Turkish citizens living abroad were able to vote from their host country for the first time in the 2014 presidential elections whereas earlier, between 1995 and



2014, citizens abroad had to travel to Turkey to cast their votes at custom offices at airports and land borders (Sevi et al., 2020). After the 2014 elections, further changes were made to enable registered Turkish emigrants to cast their votes abroad with increasing ease. By 2017, they could vote at any embassy or consulate as well as at border polling stations (ibid.). As such, the turnout rate of citizens abroad went from only 8.4% in the presidential election of 2014, to 44.7% in the 2018 general and presidential elections, with almost 1.5 million votes cast (Haber Turk, n.d.).

## Impacts on development

As stated above, with the YTB Turkey has taken a more proactive approach to diaspora engagement. In the first years of the YTB, the formation of transnational economic alliances to foster economic growth and national development in Turkey was one key aim. The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) served this purpose via organisations such as the World Turkish Business Council (*Dünya Türk İş Konseyi*). However, these efforts were not long lasting (Aksel, 2019). At the same time, the YTB has also developed economic incentives to encourage transnational citizenship. As pointed out by one expert in the field, the YTB contributed to a new regulation that allows Turkish emigrants to work part-time abroad while having a retirement pension from Turkey.

As discussed in detail in the section on Impacts on development, remittances from the Turkish diaspora have had a great impact on the economic development of Turkey, especially between the 1960s and 1990s. Recently, however, the informal transfer of remittances has become more common, and they are at the same time no longer of central political importance. As such, the volume of remittance inflows has become difficult to track. While the importance of remittances to national development has lessened, they continue to have an impact on individual households and local development.

## Key incoherence across policies

There are three incoherencies in the diaspora policies of Turkey. First, diaspora engagement activities are conducted through mosque associations, or other associations in close alliance with the current *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP or Justice and Development Party in English) government, which tend to disregard the non-religious and non-Sunni members of the diaspora, as well as oppositional groups.

Second, bureaucratic obstacles in Turkey make it difficult for the Turkish diaspora to maintain close ties with their homeland. For instance, as narrated by one expert, a Turkish citizen living abroad who files for divorce in another country must go through a cumbersome bureaucratic procedure before the divorce can be recognised by the legal authorities in Turkey. Moreover, according to Mencütek and Başer (2018), migrants in Germany report that the legal rights guaranteed by the Blue Card often fail to be recognised in practice (i.e., pension rights).

Third, the Turkish government's decision to close down the Central Bank's remittance accounts in 2014 is incoherent with their diaspora policies, which aim to enhance the contribution of the diaspora to the socioeconomic

development of the country. Relatedly, pensions paid to retirees living abroad, according to one expert, have had a negative outcome on the national economy rather than a positive one.

## Interaction with development policies

As discussed in the section on Emigration, today, the dominant trend has been shaped by attempts to channel remittances into investments (İçduygu and Aksel, 2015) such as expatriate-seeded venture capital funds (Faist et al., 2013) or into local development projects by motivating philanthropy. For this purpose, network platforms and external branches of national business associations, supported by the state, have been established to facilitate international trade or to draw the investment interests of companies established by Turkish citizens (İçduygu and Aksel, 2015; İçduygu and Altıok, 2020). Moreover, in order to contribute to trade relations, economic growth and bilateral relations/export ties, in 2007, a semi-autonomous state agency called the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) established the World Turkish Business Council to collaborate economically with Turks abroad (Mencütek and Başer, 2018). More information on engaging the diaspora in development, in relation to their expertise, skills and know-how, is described earlier under the main diaspora policies.

## Transit migration

### Main policies

Turkey is one of the first countries as a transit country on the periphery of Europe (Oelgemöller, 2011). Since the 1980s, Turkey has been an asylum country for refugees fleeing conflicts in its wider region, such as the Iranian revolution, the Iran–Iraq war and the Gulf crisis, and it has received irregular migrants from wider regions who travel to Turkey with the intention of moving on to European countries. Turkey's role as a transit country became prominent again during the long summer of migration in 2015, leading to the March 2016 EU–Turkey statement (EU Council, 2016) that is further discussed in the section on the Externalisation of EU migration policies.

Until the mid-1990s, transit migration was largely tolerated in Turkey. Since the early 2000s, however, due to the increasing number of migrants and the intensification of the Turkey–EU negotiations, policies were introduced aimed at external and internal controls to contain and reduce transit migration through Turkey. As explained in the Immigration section, in the context of EU accession in the early 2000s, Turkey went through a major institutional and policy reform process that largely shaped transit migration policies. Along with border controls, these policies include strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Interior and Coast Guards. In close cooperation with particular EU states, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the framework of the Action Plan on Integrated Border Management was adopted in 2007. In addition, Turkey signed a Readmission Agreement (RA)

with the EU in December 2013 as further discussed in the section Externalisation of EU migration policies.

After the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013 (Republic of Turkey, 2013) and the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) in 2014, along with other migration policies in Turkey, transit migration policies have been centralised.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the Combating Irregular Migration Department, established in 2018 under the DGMM, implements policies regarding transit migration. This department is responsible for developing measures to combat irregular migration, ensuring coordination among state bodies including law enforcement units, and carrying out the provisions of the RA where Turkey is a party. Following the Action Plan of 2015–2018 for combating irregular migration, the Turkish Migration Board has endorsed the country's Strategy Document and National Action Plan for Irregular Migration covering the period 2019–2025.

## Trends

Based on these institutional foundations, major trends in transit migration policies include the following measures: 1) curbing smuggling activities, 2) strengthening controls over internal mobility of migrants and asylum seekers in Turkey, 3) taking measures for the more efficient return of apprehended irregular migrations, 4) increasing detention capacity, and 5) signing RAs with source countries. While the approach to irregular migration is securitised, the official discourse also mentions the respect for fundamental rights, including the protection of irregular migrants in vulnerable situations or safeguarding the rights of returnees (DGMM, 2022a).

First, within the framework of policies to curb smuggling activities, in 2004 a human smuggling-related law was added to Turkish law. Later, in 2010, several sections of the LFIP were modified to manage irregular migration (*ibid.*). Before this modification, Article 79 defined the punishment of human smuggling as imprisonment for three to eight years and a judicial fine of up to ten thousand days. Nevertheless, since 22 July 2010, the definition of smuggling has been extended and the related sanctions have become harsher. Even smuggling attempts or efforts to facilitate the stay of irregular migrants who overstay their visas are treated as criminal violations (Gökalp Aras and Mencütek, 2019).

Second, border controls have been enhanced with the use of new technologies including radars and thermal cameras. Turkey has a memorandum of understanding with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, known by its French acronym Frontex, since 2012 (*ibid.*). In 2013, Turkish state authorities enhanced border security infrastructure in the Aegean Sea by signing up to the Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS) project, which provides technological infrastructure designed to enable 24/7, uninterrupted surveillance of the Aegean Sea and the nearby Turkish coasts (İşleyen, 2021). Another key development is the 'security wall' at the Turkey–Syria and Turkey–Iran borders. Turkey started building a security wall

<sup>2</sup> See Üstübcü (2019) for an overview of the institutional and legal transformation of migration policies in Turkey.

(Figure 3) along its border with Syria in 2016. Official documents emphasise that the aim of replacing the fences with walls is to stop terrorist attacks originating from Syria, to monitor refugee movements, and to prevent border smuggling and illegal crossings (Gökalp Aras and Mencütek, 2019). The length of the discussed wall is 899 km, with an estimated overall cost of US\$400 million. Furthermore, Turkey has commenced constructing a wall on the Iranian border as well. According to news reports, Turkey continues to erect security walls on the borders of Iraq and Armenia too (ibid.).



**Figure 3. Turkey–Syria border wall**

Source: [www.setav.org](http://www.setav.org) and [www.HurriyetDailyNews.com](http://www.HurriyetDailyNews.com)

Third, Turkey has increased its control over the internal mobility of asylum seekers within the country and over irregular border crossings. The main policies concerning internal mobility controls involve the issuing of travel permits and regular checks of IDs and documents. After the March 2016 EU-Turkey statement (EU Council, 2016), Turkish security forces introduced more internal controls over the mobility of migrants and refugees within the country as well as over the border (Kuschminder et al., 2019). Since then, ID document stop checks have increased remarkably, in line with the obligation for having travel documents. Additionally, not carrying legal documents and violations of travel regulations are considered as reasons for apprehension followed by detention and deportation. It is noted that when authorities find out that refugees are travelling without a travel document, they are treated as irregular migrants (Gökalp Aras and Mencütek, 2019).

Fourth, detention capacity in the last two decades has been enhanced (see Figure 4). Turkey started to build detention centres in the context of negotiations with the EU by using the financial and logistical funding received (Kaytaz, 2020) (see Table 1). Overall, 28 new removal centres were constructed with a total capacity of 20,000 individuals (ibid.). While it is known that detention capacity has increased with the financial support of the EU over the past years, the number of detainees is not publicly available, however (ibid.).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, certain articles of the LFIP were amended with the adoption of Law No. 7196 in 2019. The changes enabled the detention of foreigners in transit zones (Article 7), alternatives to immigrant detention (Article 57/A), deportation appeals (Article 53), and the

<sup>3</sup> See the website of the DGMM: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/geri-gonderme-merkezleri33>

interception of detained migrants' electronic and communication devices (Article 53).<sup>4</sup>

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**Table 1. Total capacity of removal centres**

Year	Capacity
2013	2,227
2014	2,168
2015	2,943
2016	4,570
2020	20,000

Source: Compiled from DGMM (2013, 2014, 2016) and Kaytaç (2020).

As a fifth policy trend, Turkey has signed RAs with source countries in addition to destination countries. Within the framework of managing irregular migration, Turkey has signed RAs with: Syria, Greece, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Ukraine, Pakistan, Russia, Nigeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yemen, Moldova, Belarus, Montenegro, Kosovo, Norway and the EU (DGMM, 2022a). Nevertheless, the Greek–Turkish Readmission Protocol dating to 1992 remains suspended. No citizens of third countries were readmitted by Turkey from Bulgaria under either the bilateral border agreement or the EU–Turkey RA (EC, 2021). Currently, the official discourse puts emphasis on the voluntary return of apprehended and detained irregular migrants. However, experts highlighted that examples of voluntary return are rare and that most migrants sign voluntary return forms in detention without necessarily understanding its content and consequences, leading to rights infringements in practice (Karadağ and Bahar, 2022).

### Impacts on return migration

The number of migrants apprehended by security authorities increased from 11,000 in the 1990s to approximately 100,000 in 2000 (Üstübcü, 2018). Later, the number of apprehensions decreased to approximately 40,000 in 2013 and then skyrocketed to its peak in 2015 and afterwards. Before 2010, the sea route to the Greek islands was a major channel for border crossings into Greece. As patrolling increased in the sea route, however, migrants were directed to the land border between Turkey and Greece and later Turkey and Bulgaria. As a result, irregular border crossings have been periodically oscillating between the land and sea route (see Üstübcü and İçduygu, 2019).

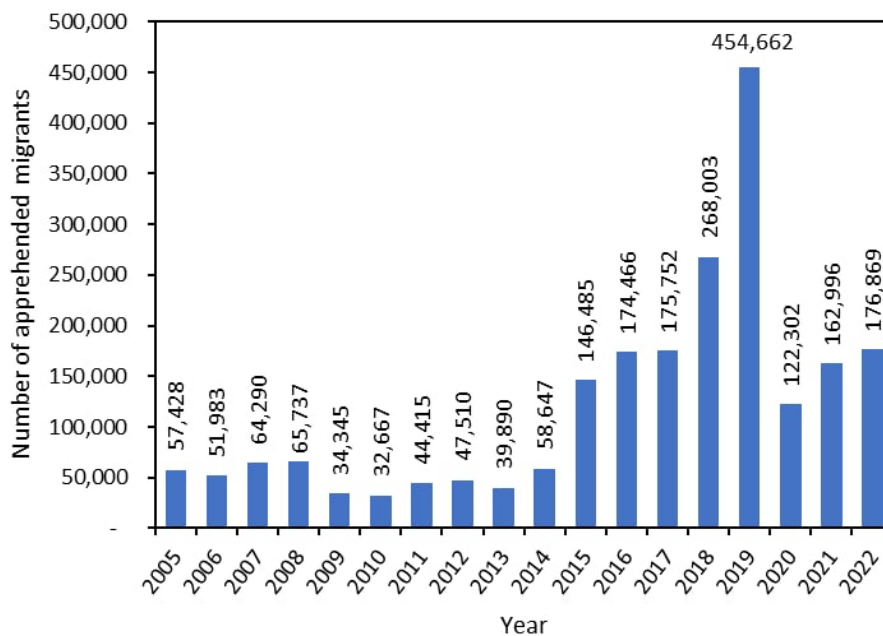
In the last two decades, most irregular border crossers were by third-country nationals rather than Turkish nationals.<sup>5</sup> Some of these transit migrants arrive legally with tourist visas, but they often drift into illegality as they

<sup>4</sup> See İneli-Ciğer (2020) for a comprehensive overview of these changes based on European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) jurisprudence.

<sup>5</sup> Turkish nationals apprehended while crossing the borders increased especially after the 2016 coup attempt.

overstay or try to enter a third country without proper travel documents. Some are IP applicants in Turkey. The main nationalities of apprehended irregular migrants consist of Afghans and Syrians, followed by Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and other immigrants from Central Asian republics, the Middle East and Africa.<sup>6</sup>

As seen in Figure 4, the official statistics of the DGMM show the number of apprehended migrants continued to increase up to 454,662 in 2019. However, it decreased sharply to 122,302 in 2020 mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, irregular migrants from Afghanistan constituted the largest number of apprehensions (201,437), followed by migrants from Pakistan (71,645) and Syria (55,236). It should be noted that the number of Syrian refugees apprehended while crossing the borders is relatively low considering their large number in Turkey.



**Figure 4. Total number of apprehended migrants**

Source: Retrieved from the DGMM, official statistics as of 18 August 2022.

Recently, the Istanbul Governor's office published a statement announcing that 'between January 1 and April 15, 2022, a total of 18,781 irregular migrants, 4,661 from Afghanistan and 1,418 from Pakistan, were detained. 7,684 of these migrants were deported from Istanbul to their countries while 7,590 of them were sent to removal centres in other provinces for deportation procedures' (Hürriyet, 2022).<sup>7</sup> Also, information made public by the DGMM indicates the total number of deported irregular migrants in 2022

<sup>6</sup> See DGMM (n.d.) for more detail on the latest figures.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the statement of the Istanbul Governor's office was a response to a rising anti-immigrant backlash, which was widespread among the mainstream media and social media.

(as of 25 April) to be 23,853, including 6,805 Afghan nationals (DGMM, 2022b).

## Impacts on development

The impact of transit migration on development is unpacked in the section on Immigration, as most transit migrants participate in the informal labour market during their stay in Turkey.

As Turkey is designated as a transit country, the EU funds several projects with the aim of containing the 4 million people who are displaced. The largest and most well-known projects are funded in the context of the 2016 EU–Turkey statement (EU Council, 2016), aiming to support and enhance the livelihood of displaced people, as discussed further in the Externalisation of EU migration policies section.

## Key incoherence across policies

Turkey has been utilizing transit migration management as a political instrument. The country uses transit/irregular migrants as a foreign policy tool in its relations with the EU, and acts as a de facto gatekeeper in managing transit migration (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2020). However, it also has lax visa policies, thus enabling the entry of potential transit migrants. Plus, as stated by an expert, internal controls regarding irregular migrants are not applied systematically.

Cooperation on transit migration between Turkey and the EU is subject to developments in Turkey–EU relations (see İçduygu and Üstübcü, 2014). Turkey's threat to open its EU borders in February–March 2020 highlights that its transit migration control is influenced by political priorities. After the Pazarkule incident, which is further discussed in the Externalisation of EU migration policies section, one expert anecdotally stated that controls in the Aegean Sea and along the land borders of Greece and Bulgaria have become less strict.

## Interaction with development policies

Transit migrants become part of the informal labour market in Turkey in various sectors, such as agriculture, textiles and construction. This interaction is explored further in the Immigration section.

## Return migration

### Main policies

There are three major return migration policies in Turkey.

First, Turkey has signed bilateral social security agreements with 30 key countries of destination, including Germany (1965), France (1973) and the

Netherlands (1968).<sup>8</sup> These agreements allow Turkish citizens enrolled in the social security systems of both countries to maintain their benefits upon return to Turkey, including sickness, maternity, old-age pensions, disability, and survivors' insurance. The Blue Card scheme, explained elsewhere, can be considered an incentive for former citizens to return, especially highly qualified workers and investors of Turkish origin who have surrendered their Turkish citizenship in order to receive citizenship in their country of destination.

Second, Turkey aims to attract highly qualified Turkish emigrants back to their home country to benefit from their knowledge, expertise and skill sets, improve research and development (R&D) capacities and boost the socioeconomic development of Turkey. The aim of these policies is to reverse brain drain and to promote brain circulation. For this purpose, the Turkish government has initiated several R&D projects and programmes and has provided funding to attract qualified researchers, scientists and PhD-students of Turkish origin so that they can continue their research activities in Turkey (Sanchez-Montijano et al., 2018).

The third return migration policy allows for the involuntary return of Turkish citizens to Turkey through the EU RA, which was signed in 2013. As further detailed in the sections on Transit migration and Externalisation of EU migration policies, this agreement concerns the return of Turkish nationals, in addition to nationals of EU Member States (from Turkey to their own countries), third-country nationals, and stateless persons who 'entered into, or stayed on, the territory of either side directly arriving from the territory of the other side' (EC, 2013).

## Trends

The promotion of the return of highly qualified Turkish citizens is the major policy trend within return migration in Turkey. This has been done with the goal of boosting the socioeconomic development of Turkey. Reversing brain drain has been on Turkey's agenda since 2007 with increasing intensity. The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) is the major institution devising and carrying out programmes for this purpose.

As highlighted by the experts interviewed, TÜBİTAK has been implementing several programmes since 2007 as part of a Reverse Brain Drain project to encourage the return of Turkish researchers from abroad. These programmes include the TÜBİTAK Directorate of Science Fellowships and Grant Programmes (BİDEB) 2232, Marie S. Curie Programmes and European Research Council Programmes. The TÜBİTAK BİDEB 2232 Scholarship was carried out between 2010 and 2018 to attract qualified Turkish researchers. Based on the Turkish Presidency's first 100-day Action Plan of 2018, which initiated the campaign for the return of Turkish scientists, the TÜBİTAK reformulated the BİDEB 2232 programme, broadened its scope and increased the budget allocated to research projects. As part of this reformulated programme, Turkey currently offers the BİDEB 2232-A International Fellowship for Outstanding Researchers and 2232-B

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.cottgroup.com/en/legislation/bilateral-treaties/bilateral-social-security-agreements>



International Fellowship for Early-Stage Researchers programmes for both Turkish and foreign nationals from different sectors.<sup>9</sup> The aim is to facilitate the establishment of a research ecosystem through which students and researchers in Turkey can benefit from the experience of incoming highly qualified scientists. The fields of applicants are mostly engineering and health.

TÜBİTAK has also been carrying out scientific meetings and workshops abroad to attract qualified Turkish researchers and professionals. With the support of the European Council, it launched a reverse brain drain campaign in 2010 to invite Turkish researchers who are in the US to permanently return to Turkey. As part of this campaign, TÜBİTAK organised 12 Target Turkey Workshops in the US and Europe which reached approximately 1,500 Turkish scholars (TÜBİTAK, 2015).

Additionally, the Attracting Qualified Human Resources Programme was initiated in 2014 as outlined in the 10th Development Plan (Ministry of Development, 2014). The Programme aims to make Turkey an attractive country for highly qualified national and international human resources, especially Turkish nationals residing abroad who work in priority areas of Turkey's development agenda and can stimulate Turkish development processes (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2014; GFMD, 2015). For this purpose, the Programme aims to create suitable working environments and conditions for these highly skilled professionals, and to improve collaboration among universities, industries, the public sector and research centres.

The YTB has also been active in implementing policies to promote return migration. It is now taking over the Central Higher Education Exam for Turkish Emigrants' Children to select successful students of Turkish origin to come and enrol in Turkish universities, and to increase the quota reserved for such candidates by universities. The Presidency is also generating schemes in collaboration with private companies, universities and public institutions to attract highly skilled children of Turkish emigrants to continue their professional career in Turkey (Sanchez-Montijano et al., 2018).

## Impacts on return migration

Several actors, such as TÜBİTAK, the Turkish Aerospace Industries and the EU, have been effective in promoting the return of Turkish researchers. The Target Turkey programme implemented by TÜBİTAK has so far attracted hundreds of highly skilled Turkish scholars and scientists living abroad, especially in the US and Canada, to return to Turkey (Adaman and Kaya, 2012). Other examples are EU-funded projects, such as the Marie S. Curie Reintegration Grants. During the 7th Framework Programme, between 2007 and 2014, Turkey received 204 Marie Curie Career Reintegration Grants (Papila, 2015; Elveren, 2018). In the same period, 235 researchers returned to Turkey through Marie Curie scholarships and other support provided by the European Research Council (Elveren, 2018). As part of TÜBİTAK's BİDEB-2232

<sup>9</sup> The detailed information on these programs can be found at TUBITAK BİDEB website <https://ebideb.tubitak.gov.tr/giris.htm>

(2010–2018), 450 Turkish researchers were funded, and in the first term of the reformulated BİDEB-2232 programme 98 Turkish researchers were funded and returned to Turkey.

The growing number of English language foundation (private) universities is also creating a more appealing environment for Turkish-origin scholars and researchers (İçduygu, 2009; Sanchez-Montijano et al., 2018). For instance, some initiatives and policies led by well-established private universities, offering higher pay and a favourable academic environment, have been effective in encouraging the return of Turkish academics working abroad (Gökbayrak, 2009).

The motivation for the return of these highly qualified Turkish scholars remains unclear, however. Some sources claim that the push factors in countries of residence (such as xenophobia, discrimination, social and cultural problems) play a bigger role in causing reverse brain-drain (Ünver, 2010), while others point to emotional, familial and cultural reasons for the return of highly skilled Turkish citizens as more important than financial and professional considerations (Yılmaz Şener, 2018).

Even though TÜBİTAK's programmes seem to have an impact on the return migration of highly skilled emigrants, these policies do not have a direct effect on returns becoming permanent stays. One expert shared that out of 450 researchers who returned to Turkey as part of the BİDEB 2232 programme, 15 re-emigrated according to TÜBİTAK's database. However, as this database is updated only by the researchers themselves, this number is not official nor reliable. The lack of a proper database updated by a central authority limits the assessment of the impact.

As for the EU RA, it is difficult to assess its impact on return. According to EUROSTAT (2022b) data, 1,670 Turkish citizens have returned under the RA with the EU from 2014 to 2020, with the largest number returning from Austria (720), Hungary (420) and Bulgaria (255). The number of Turkish citizens who have returned from an EU Member State following an order to leave appears to be slightly declining. Between 2011 and 2015 there was an average of 342 per year; however, between 2016 and 2020 the average was 330 per year (EUROSTAT, 2022c). The majority of these are from Germany, France and the Netherlands.

## Impacts on development

Programmes related to the return of highly skilled individuals have great potential to impact the development of Turkey. Returning academics have contributed to teaching and research in universities. However, it is difficult to measure the impact of the BİDEB-2232 programme which started in 2018. The previous programme had a low research budget of around only 50,000 TL (roughly US\$11,000 in 2018). In the new programme, the budget allocated for research has been raised to 1.7 million TL (roughly US\$380,000), with, according to one expert, an estimated overall project budget of between 2 million TL and 4 million TL (roughly US\$450,000–US\$900,000 in 2018). Experts expect a larger impact with this new programme. However, there are some incoherencies as discussed below.

## Key incoherence across policies

Despite the Turkish government's declaration of intent and its intensified efforts to reverse brain drain, as one expert noted, the government has only taken small-scale policy initiatives in this regard and has yet to develop a holistic policy framework with its relevant mechanisms.

For instance, Turkey has not developed any particular scheme to support returnees and their families to reintegrate into Turkish society (Adaman and Kaya, 2012; Sanchez-Montijano et al., 2018). The existing labour market structure is not suitable for the integration of the highly skilled group, who are targeted by the current return policies but with incentives that fall short. In particular, researchers who conduct their research in public universities find it difficult to receive tenure and are thus hesitant to continue working in the same institution following the end of the project. Moreover, high-quality private universities are not keen to hire professors who have received their PhDs from Turkish universities. One expert explained that if researchers with PhDs from Turkish universities emigrate to continue their academic career, they mostly do not want to return to Turkey even when they are offered incentives and financial support.

TÜBİTAK recently prepared a handbook for incoming researchers to guide them on the legal and financial matters upon their arrival to Turkey and to accelerate their adaptation process. One expert suggested that more work and coordination is needed between different institutions to facilitate the integration of researchers and increase the likelihood of their permanent stay.

## Interaction with development policies

Improving research infrastructure is an important objective of Turkey's science, technology and innovation strategies. Ensuring effective mechanisms for financing innovation and R&D are among its priority areas as well (in the 11th Development Plan – see Presidency for Strategy and Budget, 2019). The Turkish government's policies on the return of qualified human resources have been shaped by concerns around boosting socioeconomic development in the country through the transfer to Turkey of knowledge, expertise and know-how from highly skilled Turkish nationals living abroad.

The Turkish Research Area (TARAL) was launched in 2004 to foster R&D facilities in the country and trigger the mobilisation of resources and key stakeholders, such as from business enterprises, the public sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) towards R&D and innovation. Increasing the share of R&D expenditure in GDP, the demand for R&D and the number of qualified R&D personnel are among the TARAL targets (Turkish Research Area, n.d.). As part of this strategy, the share of funds allocated from Turkey's GDP to R&D investments doubled from 2002 to 2012 (from 0.5% to 1%) (Elveren, 2018).

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## Main policies

Throughout the 20th century, Turkey was a land of immigration for Muslim and Turkic groups from the wider region, but these arriving groups were perceived as natural citizens rather than immigrants. During recent decades, Turkey has experienced a variety of migratory flows, leading to a complex immigration scene that includes transit migration, irregular labour migration, asylum-seeking, refugees and documented migration.

Since the 1980s, Turkey's proximity to conflict-torn regions, coupled with relatively liberal visa policies, has enabled different forms of undocumented entry and stay by foreign nationals (İçduygu and Yüksek, 2012). Among those arriving in Turkey since the 1980s are immigrants fleeing conflicts and oppressive regimes in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and most recently Syria, as well as labour migrants from the post-Soviet region. Syrians were settled as 'guests', and these refugees were later provided temporary protection (TP) status in October 2014. In September 2021, there were over 3.7 million Syrians under Temporary Protection (SuTP) and over 330,000 displaced people under IP in Turkey (UNHCR, 2021).

To deal with different forms of arrival, various laws and regulations have been established since the early 2000s. Most were within the framework of EU acquis, decisions by the European Court of Human Rights against Turkey, and reports of rights violations from national and international civil society actors (Kirişçi, 2012; see also HCA, 2007). Additionally, in 2008, a new Border Management Bureau and a Migration and Asylum Bureau were established under the Ministry of the Interior in close collaboration with IOM and UNHCR. The Migration and Asylum Bureau was later turned into the DGMM and was responsible for drafting the LFIP. This draft was publicised in 2011, enacted in 2013 and came into force in 2014. The LFIP classified the Turkish asylum policy as law for the first time and combined the dispersed regulations on entry, stay and deportation of foreigners. With the initiation of the LFIP, the DGMM and its organisations at the provincial level gradually become the main responsible state body for migration policies and implementation instead of the National Police and various other state bodies.

As discussed in the Transit migration section, the LFIP has evolved many times since its first enactment in 2013 to reflect changes in Turkish migration policies. Currently, major groups dealt under immigration policies in Turkey are transit migrants, irregular labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and immigrants of various legal status including foreign professionals, students, retirees and lifestyle migrants.

## Trends

### Irregular migration

As explained in the section on Transit migration, curbing irregular migration, especially irregular border crossings, is one of the major immigration policy trends in Turkey. Besides external and internal border

controls, there are also labour market-oriented and other policies aiming to reduce irregular labour migrants.

Before the LFIP, foreigners staying in Turkey for various purposes including work could renew their tourist visa by leaving and re-entering the country once the length of stay on their visa expired. This form of circular migration is no longer possible as Article 19 of the LFIP requires foreigners staying more than 90 days to apply for residence permits.

Another trend is the introduction of policies directly targeting the labour market. This started with the 2003 Law on the Work Permit for Foreigners No. 4817. Accordingly, the Ministry of Labour is responsible for issuing work permits to foreigners upon request by an employer. Currently, the provision of work permits for foreigners is regulated under the LFIP. Note that the Turkish labour market is characterised by widespread informality, however. Although raids of workplaces are carried out to detect irregular migrants and employers' sanctions are in place, informality is commonly if not always tolerated (Toksöz et al., 2012; Üstübici, 2018; Nimer and Rottmann, 2021).

### Forced migration

Regarding forced migration policies in Turkey, a major policy trend is the differentiation between forced migrants as SuTP and non-Syrians under IP.

In 2014, the Regulation on TP specified the terms of registration and stay in Turkey without determining the length of protection, based on Article 91 of the LFIP. Accordingly, SuTP are granted rights and services, with the requirement to register with the authorities in a province of their own choice in order to be provided TP status. Once applicants have received their card and identity number, they can benefit from the right to access public services, especially healthcare and education; however, this is only in provinces in which they are registered. The mobility between provinces of TP holders is subject to official authorisation granted by Provincial Departments of Migration Management of their province of registration.

As codified in the LFIP, non-Syrian asylum seekers, if recognised, become 'conditional refugees' and eventually are resettled to third countries. They are assigned to a 'satellite city' where they are expected to reside and prove their presence by providing signatures to provincial authorities on a regular basis. Hence, their internal mobility is subject to official permission. Provinces designated as satellite cities in Turkey are geographically located away from the western coast and land borders with Greece and Bulgaria. The number of satellite cities gradually increased from 24 in 2003 to more than 60 in 2013 (Kahya and Sallan, 2017). Since September 2018, when the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process run by the DGMM ended and if an application is accepted, individuals are granted 'conditional refugee status' or 'subsidiary protection'. However, according to expert interviews, refugees are progressively forced to register in cities with poor reception amenities, inadequate humanitarian support necessary to meet their basic needs and fewer employment opportunities.

Another major policy trend is the effort to incorporate asylum seekers in the labour market. The Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection was enacted in 2016 based on the agenda introduced

by the EU–Turkey Joint Action Plan in 2015 (EC, 2015). This regulation has allowed SuTP to access work permit processes upon application by their employers. A similar regulation was later adopted for other groups under conditional refugee status. Despite these efforts, however, major obstacles still block formal employment. The widespread informality as a structural feature of the labour market, the unwillingness of employers, bureaucratic procedures to obtain a work permit, and the negative perceptions toward Syrians in general have made formal employment a rare achievement for refugee workers. Although both SuTP and non-Syrians with IP may have lived in Turkey for more than a decade, they do not have permanent stay rights in the country. For now, it seems that the provision of exceptional citizenship, as announced by President Erdoğan in July 2016, is the only way towards permanent stay in Turkey. Since that time, Syrian refugees living in Turkey have been selectively invited to apply for Turkish citizenship and by May 2022, a total of 200,950 SuTP had been granted Turkish citizenship (DW, 2022). A considerable number of them are either entrepreneurs, university graduates or young professionals working for the recently developed CSOs working with the Syrian community.

Developments in the post-2018 period have led to more centralised and securitised policies, especially in relation to access to legal status and healthcare (Karadağ and Bahar, 2022). In addition to increased controls over internal mobility, another trend has been the decline of registrations both for SuTP and non-Syrians under IP in larger cities. Access to healthcare for non-Syrians under IP is also a concern. As of 2019, the right to free healthcare for adults under IP was limited to one year after registration, after which people are expected to pay for their public health insurance (*ibid.*).

Moreover, while debates around the integration and social cohesion of SuTP continue, Turkish authorities have started to put more emphasis on the discourses around return policies for Syrian refugees (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019). Article 87 of the LFIP implies the right for voluntary return of applicants and beneficiaries of TP along with the necessity of providing material and financial support to applicants who wish to return voluntarily. The DGMM is responsible for carrying out the voluntary repatriation activities in cooperation with international organisations, public institutions, agencies and CSOs. Accordingly, the Turkish government initiated a National Assisted Voluntary Return Programme in June 2019. Before then, only the IOM's return programme was in place, but it further improved in 2019 by giving full authority to the DGMM to coordinate voluntary returns. Based on these national return mechanisms, SuTP, non-Syrians under IP, asylum applicants and undocumented migrants will be supported if they apply to the authorities for voluntary return (Mencütek, 2022). To further enable voluntary return, in 2019 President Erdoğan announced that Turkey had initiated the establishment of a peace corridor on Turkey's border with Syria. Government officials emphasize that Turkey has reconstructed destroyed hospitals, schools, mosques and roads in this area (Adar, 2020).

The DGMM also tries to enhance its capacities for assisted returns, receiving financial assistance and expertise from the EU. The ReConnect Project funded by Switzerland's Federal Undersecretariat for Migration (SEM) aims to support the establishment and implementation of the National Voluntary

Return and Reintegration system of Turkey (NAVRR) by training 300 Return Counsellors from 81 Provincial Departments of Migration Management and the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC). The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in Turkey is responsible for the management and implementation of this project and it will continue between 2021 and 2023 (ICMPD, 2022).

### Legal migration

The LFIP changed the old Law on Residence and Travel of Foreigners and introduced clauses regarding the stay of foreigners in the country. With the LFIP, the DGMM became the main authority to decide on residence permits instead of local police. Firstly, Article 19 of the LFIP obligated foreigners to apply for a residence permit if they intend to stay more than 90 days or more than their visa period. Moreover, the LFIP allowed applications to be made to the Turkish consulates before arrival or to governorates within Turkey in special cases. The LFIP introduced different types of residence permit depending on the purpose of the stay. Long-term residence permits and humanitarian residence permits were introduced for the first time (Dardağan Kibar, 2013).

One more major immigration policy trend is the attraction of highly skilled migrants. Turkey's Turquoise Card is a point-based application system aimed at attracting highly skilled foreigners and high-level investors to Turkey with the right to work and live in the country indefinitely. Although the card was introduced under the International Labour Law, which came into force in 2016 and was prepared with all the necessary infrastructure, the expert we interviewed noted that the system has not been activated yet due to lack of a political decision on the part of the higher authorities. So, currently there is no Turquoise Card holder in Turkey. However, there are qualified individuals who are already working in technology centres and the information sector in Turkey. With this system, Turkey aims to attract a highly qualified workforce and investors not only from Europe but mostly from countries like China, India and Pakistan. So far, implementation has not met this policy aim, as an expert observed.

Beside attracting a qualified workforce, Turkey also aims to attract international students and become an educational hub for students from different backgrounds. To this end, the YTB has been administering the Türkiye Scholarships Programme, an international student mobility programme.<sup>10</sup> The main goal of the YTB is to attract students from countries that Turkey aims to build strategic partnership with. It is expected that these students will act as bridges of amity between their home country and Turkey after graduation. The Turkish government tries to promote the return of these students by various mechanisms, such as mobilising alumni networks. However, there is no obligation, on paper, for these students to go back home upon graduation. The scholarship programme of the YTB currently has 17,000 funded students mainly from Asian Pacific countries, followed by African countries. The YTB also tries to answer the needs of Syrian youth in Turkey by providing a comprehensive package of university/programme placements, tuition fees, health insurance, accommodation, monthly stipends

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/>

and Turkish language courses. In addition, it aims to facilitate the work transition of Syrian youth by equipping them with the necessary skills. Since 2016, as one expert mentioned, the YTB has been implementing the Higher Education for Syrian Youth project in collaboration with the UNHCR to facilitate access to higher education among the Syrian Youth in Turkey.

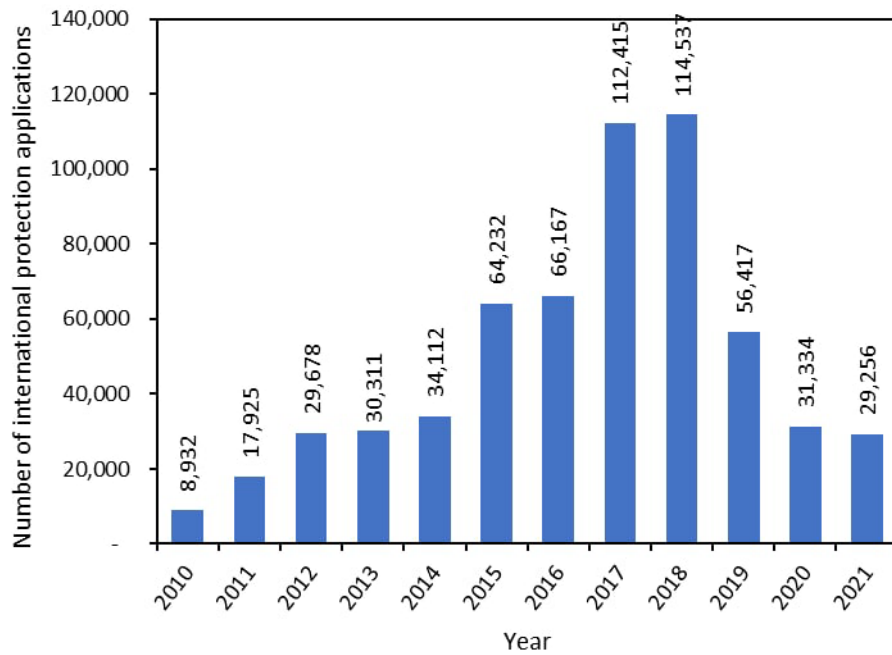
Turkey recently expanded its 'citizenship-by-investment' programme by easing the conditions for citizenship for individuals buying real estate and investing in Turkey. Accordingly, foreigners buying real estate valued at US\$400,000 or more and with a legally binding no re-sell commitment for the next three years may benefit from this scheme. Similarly, foreigners depositing a certain amount of money in Turkish banks are eligible to apply for citizenship. According to this regulation, foreigners who invest a fixed capital of at least US\$500,000 (or an equivalent amount in other currencies) in an active bank in Turkey can apply for citizenship three years after the initial deposit. Moreover, if a foreigner hires or creates jobs for at least 50 Turkish citizens, as attested by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MFLSS), they too are eligible to apply for Turkish citizenship (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2022). Government officials stated that between 2018 and 2021, a total of 19,630 foreigners were granted citizenship by purchasing houses in Turkey (Gazeteduvar, 2021).

### Impacts on immigration

It is hard to estimate the volume of irregular migration in Turkey. The number of migrants apprehended by security forces provides a limited picture and indicates that the number had been on the rise until 2019 but declined in 2020 and 2021. This decline is due to COVID-19 restrictions that limited smuggling activities. However, officials have underscored that increasing internal controls have boosted the number of apprehended irregular migrants as well. The Governate of Istanbul, for instance, announced that, in 2021, 71,959 irregular migrants were detained in Istanbul (Euronews, 2022).

Current statistics show a growing trend in the number of individuals requiring IP, starting long before the crisis in Syria. For example, the number of non-Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey in 2005 increased from a few thousand to more than 34,000 applications in 2014 (Üstübcü, 2018). This trend continued until more than 114,000 annual applicants were received by 2018.

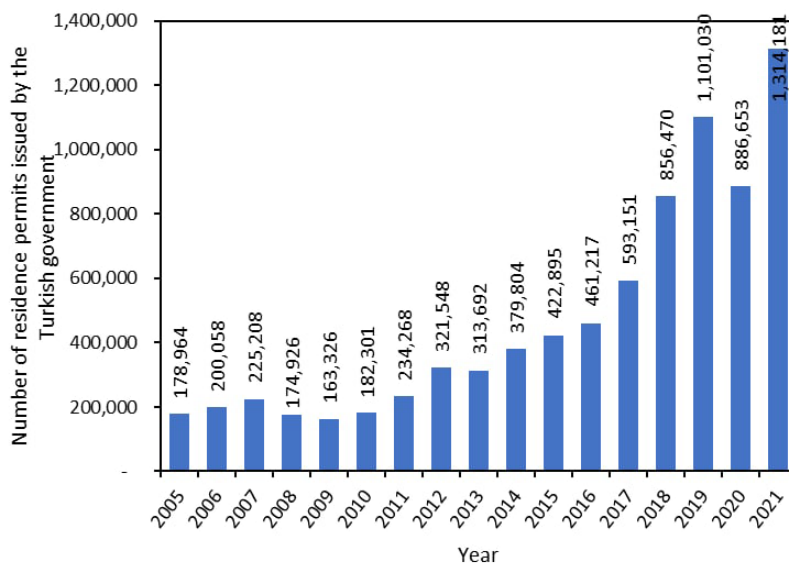




**Figure 5. Number of IP applications**

Source: Retrieved from DGMM (n.d.), official statistics as of 18 August 2022.

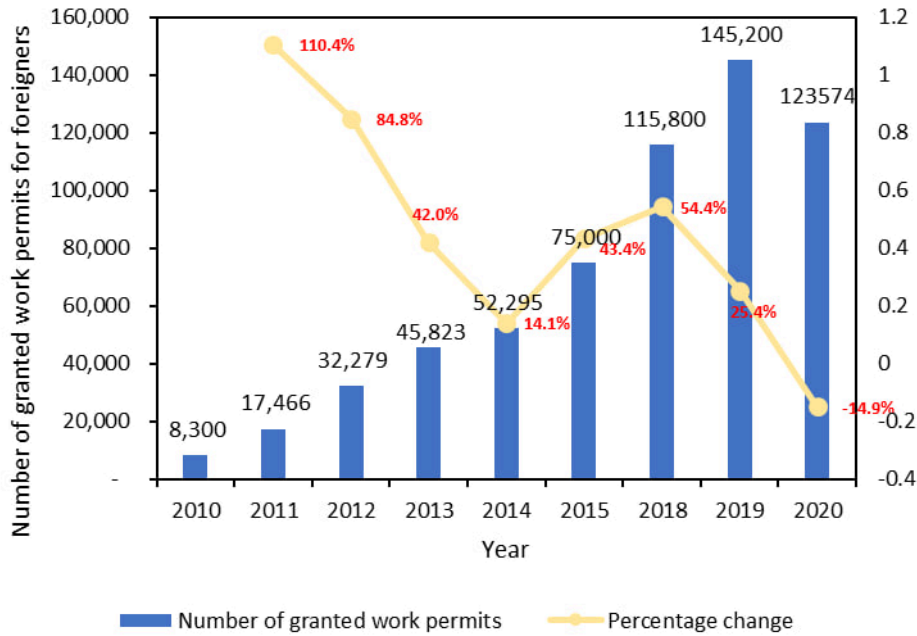
By the end of 2021, there were over 3.7 million SuTP in Turkey. Of these, only 50,736 were living in temporary accommodation centres located in five different provinces of Turkey. Urban centres such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, Hatay and Şanlıurfa host most SuTP in Turkey. Moreover, in the past decade, the number of residence permits issued by the Turkish government to foreigners has significantly increased (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Number of residence permits issued by the Turkish government**

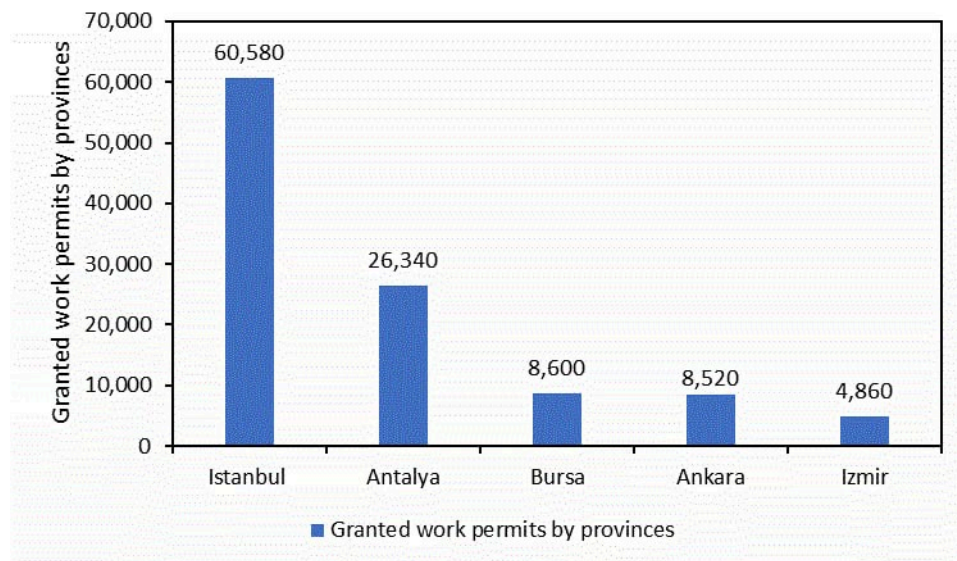
Source: Retrieved from DGMM (n.d.), official statistics as of 18 August 2022.

The official data of the MFLSS indicates a clear increase in the number of work permits granted to foreigners from 2010 to 2018. While the number of issued work permits in 2010 stood at 8,300, it increased to 145,200 in 2019 (see Figure 7). Istanbul has granted the highest number of work permits (60,580), followed by Antalya (26,340), Bursa (8,600), Ankara (8,520) and Izmir (4,860) (Figure 8). The major employment sectors are domestic work (16,765), education (4,420), health (4,603) and tourism (1,980) (MFLSS, 2020).



**Figure 7. Number of granted work permits**

Source: Compiled from MFLSS (2020).



**Figure 8. Granted work permits by province**

Source: Compiled from MFLSS (2020).

By 2020, Syrians had received 62,369 work permits (MFLSS, 2020). These work permits were issued to Syrian nationals with a valid residence permit along with those under TP. As such, there are more than 2 million working-aged SuTP in Turkey. This highlights the shortcomings of the government's integration policies. This regulation limits the employment of Syrians to a maximum 10% employment quota in many sectors. In practice, work permit regulations focus on refugees with economic and cultural capital, like young refugees with language skills, business owners or those with a connection to the non-profit sector. This strategy has resulted in the majority of refugees and asylum seekers being excluded from the formal labour market and left in the abusive informal labour market.

Turkey's effort to promote voluntary returns through nationally assisted voluntary return programmes and its cross-border operations to build a safe zone in northern Syria have resulted in an increased in the refugee returnees.

Before the beginning of the voluntary return programmes in 2019, only the IOM's assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programme was in place in Turkey. It is reported that only some 8,098 migrants were provided AVRR return support from 2009 to 2018 (Mencütek, 2022). According to EU statistics, Turkey returned 96,201 irregular migrants during 2019 and more than half of them were returned to Afghanistan. Regarding the return of Syrians, Turkish officials reported that, as of October 2019, around 364,663 had returned voluntarily to their country. Also, in March 2022, the head of the DGMM stated that 500,000 Syrians had returned voluntarily to their country due to Turkey's efforts to establish a safe zone (Daily Sabah, 2022).

## Impacts on development

With more than 65% of all Syrian refugees residing in the country, Turkey now hosts the largest refugee population of any country (UNHCR, 2022). This has had implications for national development, especially for the labour market. Migrant workers, including SuTP, non-Syrians under IP and undocumented migrants, are widespread in the textile, food production and seasonal agricultural sectors. Besides the incorporation of Syrian refugees in the (in)formal labour force, as one expert stated, Turkey has a lax attitude towards the participation of irregular migrants in labour market as they have a functional role in the Turkish economy. One interviewee provided particular information on the Adana region, where there is significant informal employment of Syrians in the textile and shoe sectors. Accordingly, informality is part of daily life there, such that nobody questions it anymore. There are shortages of workers in sectors like textiles, shoe making and agriculture, as Turkish workers do not favour such jobs. As such, these sectors seem to be very dependent on the Syrian workforce.

Several reports and studies identify a positive contribution of Syrians to Turkey's labour market. For instance, a World Bank report from 2015 states that 26% of newly established firms in Turkey in 2014 had either Syrian ownership or Syrian capital (World Bank, 2015, cited in Yılmaz, 2020). Moreover, due to the participation of Syrians in the Turkish labour market, the probability of working in the informal market for Turkish citizens declined by 2.26% (Tümen, 2016).

Despite the economic gains acquired through the cheap Syrian labour, many experts claimed that there is a generally negative perception towards Syrian workers. However, Syrians are often paid less than the local workforce and some employers have expressed a moral satisfaction from employing refugees as they say they are saving them from poverty and poor living conditions (Siviş, 2021). Meanwhile, employers generally refrain from hiring Syrians through formal means, preferring informal employment instead to avoid insurance and other administrative costs.

### Key incoherence across policies

Geographical limitations on the implementation of the 1951 Geneva Convention constitutes a major incoherence between the commitment to provide IP to those in need and denying fully fledged refugee status for asylum seekers originating from non-European countries. As such, only those from European countries can be admitted as refugees in Turkey. One of the expectations of the Turkish National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration in 2005 was the lifting of geographical limitations on the Geneva Convention. However, the LFIP did not do this as officials were concerned that Turkey would become a buffer zone between refugee-generating countries and places of ultimate destination for refugees.

There are also issues of incoherence regarding the implementation of existing IP policies. Large urban centres, where there are employment opportunities for migrants and refugees, have been closed to registration for both SuTP and other nationalities under IP. Accordingly, those seeking protection in Turkey are referred to smaller provinces which lack reception infrastructure in terms of civil society and community support and employment conditions. This policy yields a dilemma for SuTP and non-Syrians under IP in choosing between two options: either live in economically less developed provinces but benefit from legal status and its protection (healthcare, education and other benefits), or live in a big city like Istanbul to benefit from its economic opportunities, access to the informal market, and the support of the established community for ease-of-access to their basic needs (Karadağ and Üstübcü, 2021).

Although eight years of uninterrupted formal employment in Turkey enables migrants to apply for a permanent work permit, as stated in the LFIP, no one has so far been granted this permanent permit. This is mainly because five years of uninterrupted residence enables the path for citizenship, and experts underscore that migrant workers in Turkey prefer to apply for citizenship after five years rather than waiting for eight years of employment and apply for a permanent work permit.

Despite the emphasis given to attracting skilled migrants, the economic structure (competitive wages, working conditions) of competitive sectors such as finance and IT is not suitable for this policy aim. Also, as of now, the legal framework lacks such infrastructure to facilitate the employment of highly skilled migrants.

Relatedly, the Turkey Scholarships programme aims to attract students from abroad so that these graduates can foster good relations between Turkey and their home country. The programme expects the students to return to their

countries upon graduation. Currently, the YTB and the MLFSS are cooperating to allow these programme graduates to obtain work permits in Turkey; however, according to one expert, no automatic residence permit process is in place to keep these qualified students in the country. Experts emphasised that it would be more in line with the policy aims if some of the students who speak Turkish and are familiar with the culture were integrated into the labour market. This would meet the current requirements of the market and boost the country's development.

## Interaction with development policies

Turkey does not have a sustainable long-term immigration strategy to actively recruit immigrants to boost the development of the country, apart from particular initiatives to encourage the return of highly skilled Turkish nationals (see section on Return migration). In other words, immigration policy is reactive rather than proactive, and the migration–development nexus is ad hoc rather than planned. For instance, the SIHHAT (health) project is an EU-funded project that, as explained in the Externalisation of EU migration policies section, provides healthcare assistance to Syrians in Turkey and enables the employment of Syrian doctors and healthcare professionals in the healthcare system. According to experts, this project was an ad hoc response rather than a planned strategy with the agenda of attracting highly skilled migrants.

In terms of education, the provision of public education and a high enrolment rate is one of the major long-term development targets of Turkey. Displaced Syrian youth have low school enrolment rates (and also poor access to child healthcare and low vaccination rates, among other aspects related to development). These low rates of school enrolment have led to concerns of a lost generation of Syrian children, therefore concrete steps have been taken to ensure the enrolment of displaced Syrian children into the public education system. As of 2021, over 771,428 Syrian children were enrolled in kindergarten, primary school, middle school and high school. However, there are 432,956 children of school-age who still do not attend an education setting (Mülteciler Derneği, 2021).

The Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MoFSP), the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the TRC, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) implemented a national social assistance programme called the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) for refugees. This is an extension of the CCTE programme implemented by the MoFSP in 2003 for Turkish citizens and foreigners residing in Turkey. All refugees who are residing in off-camp settings, regardless of nationality, can benefit from this assistance (if they meet the eligibility criteria). Families where all members are registered in Turkey with no regular income, social security or high value asset are eligible for the CCTE cash transfer, conditional on the regular school attendance of their children (from kindergarten to Grade 12) (UNHCR Turkey, n.d.).

## Internal migration

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### Main policies

As of 2020, Turkey's urban population made up 75.7% of the total population (Worldometers, n.d.), concentrated mainly in metropolitan areas and large cities. Internal migration flows are generally directed from east to west and from inland areas to large urban centres or coastal areas. Istanbul remains the most important destination of choice (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2014). Socioeconomic differences between regions, such as income differentials and unemployment, are significant factors in driving internal migratory flows (Gezici and Keskin, 2005; Gökhan and Filiztekin, 2008).

There are no policies restricting internal migration, but incentives have been introduced and several projects have been carried out to foster more even regional development, and hence more balanced internal migration. Regional development and urbanisation policies have been important concerns and policy areas in the 10th (2014–2018) and the 11th (2019–2023) National Development Plans.

The Turkish government has been implementing active regional development policies to achieve socioeconomic and spatial integration with more balanced distribution of welfare across the country. For this purpose, the National Strategy for Regional Development (NSRD) has been put into action for the period 2014–2023 with four general objectives: reducing regional disparities with a more evenly distributed welfare system, contributing to national development by both stimulating development potentials and improving competitiveness in regions, reinforcing economic and social integration, and building a more balanced nationwide settlement structure (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development, 2014).

Additionally, Turkey launched the Attraction Centres Support Programme in 2016 which will continue until 2023. The aim of the programme is to encourage business activity and investment in 23 economically disadvantaged provinces in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey. The beneficiaries who are eligible for granted incentives for their investments in designated cities include the manufacturing industry, call centres and data centres. The goal of the programme is to reduce economic disparity between regions and internal migration to developed cities in the Marmara region. Hence, the programme aims to improve the living and employment opportunities and infrastructure of cities in underdeveloped regions with the economic potential to keep a qualified workforce, turning these cities into centres for socioeconomic progress.

### Trends

Internal migration is an important phenomenon in Turkey precipitated by socioeconomic reasons such as disparities in regional development and by political reasons, such as the armed conflict between the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state and its proceeding internal displacement. Since the mid-1980s, the PKK has engaged in a violent rebellion against the Turkish state, leading to approximately 30,000 casualties (mostly ethnic Kurds). While still ongoing, the war became less intense after the capture of

the PKK leader in February 1999. Even so, an estimated 378,335 to 1.2 million people have been displaced within Turkey due to the conflict (Stefanovic et al., 2015). What had started as forced internal migration was later sustained through solidarity networks in urban centres. In this period, migration took place mostly from eastern Turkey to the western part of the country; however, people also migrated within the east, particularly to more secure regions. By July 2009, approximately 187,000 had returned to their homes (ibid.), but the majority had not.

Intra-regional migration has tended to increase in the last decade. However, a significant part of migration continues to be directed towards Istanbul as few other locations are as appealing, especially in the eastern and the western Black Sea, the central-east Anatolia and the north-east Anatolia regions. As such, starting in 2008, the Growth Poles Support Programme has been launched gradually in Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Şanlıurfa and Van to sustain the trend of intra-regional migration. The goal of this programme is to transform major cities of central and eastern Turkey into locations that appeal to Turkish citizens (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2014). Furthermore, in order to improve financial and institutional aspects that would foster more coherence between policy and implementation regarding regional development, significant regulations have been put into practice. For instance, the Supreme Regional Development Council and Regional Development Committee were formed, and development agencies in all 26 sub-regions have been operationalised at the local level (ibid.).

## Impacts on internal migration

Regional development programmes have had an impact on internal migration in terms of reducing movement towards the metropolises. However, as socioeconomic development disparities between east-west and inland-coasts remain significant (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2019), internal migration to more developed areas has persisted and is likely to increase steadily.

Even though these development projects have had an impact on increasing agricultural employment, subsistence farming enterprises remain the major form of employment, with their associated size and marketing issues impeding income. Hence, rural poverty continues to be a significant factor that triggers internal migration (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2014).

## Impacts on development

It is difficult to assess the impact of programmes and projects aimed at reducing regional disparities. For instance, one expert noted that it is difficult to measure the impact of the Attraction Centres Support Programme on development as the ministry coordinating the programme is working with very limited financial resources. The same expert also added that for these programmes to create a large impact, the policy should be adopted by the highest political authority and carried out in a more holistic manner.

Internal migration has created many urbanisation issues in large cities, such as overpopulation, housing problems, increased squatting, employment issues, a growing informal sector and urban poverty. Particularly, Turkey's

late industrialisation and urbanisation has contributed to the development of the informal economy. During the late 1980s and 1990s, the free market economy and privatisation process incorporated some forced internal migrants into the cheap and informal labour force in various sectors, such as construction, peddling and the service sectors as they could not easily access the formal labour market (Adaman and Kaya, 2012). More recently, urban regeneration projects have uprooted and displaced the poor and lower-middle class who were already living in a precarious state (Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, 2014; Cin and Eğercioğlu, 2016).

### Key incoherence across policies

Although the government develops incentives and programmes to reduce socioeconomic disparities between regions and implements subsidy programmes in the agricultural field, these policies remain insufficient to keep farmers in rural areas. The input costs of farming are high and credit policies favour larger enterprises making the business risky and unsustainable, particularly for small enterprises (Öztürk, 2012). Furthermore, although the state tries to keep rural populations in rural areas and decrease rural–urban migration, it also carries out many infrastructure and development projects in rural areas such as the construction of dams and highways which often take over agricultural lands. These further diminish agricultural prospects and employment, triggering more internal migration. Even though these projects create employment opportunities in the construction sector, they are not sustainable but rather short-to-medium term. Moreover, often internal migrants not the local population work in the construction sector, while local people lose their main livelihood, which is agriculture.

### Interaction with development policies

Turkey does not have a direct policy aimed at regulating internal migration, but rather development policies that seek to decrease regional disparities. These policies are already covered in the sections on Internal migration, Main policies and Trends. These regional development policies aim to discourage internal migration to developed cities in the west and coastal areas. If they achieve their goals of fostering socioeconomic development in disadvantaged areas with improved quality of life and employment opportunities, then intense migratory flows from east to west and from inland to coastal regions have the potential to decrease.

## Externalisation of EU migration policies

### Main policies

Over the last 20 years, the external aspects of the EU's migration policies have affected the border and legal framework of Turkey and the experiences of migrants within the country (Üstübici and İçduygu, 2019; Üstübici, 2019).

As explained in the Transit migration section, these policies range from investing in border infrastructure, stricter controls, legislative changes and



efforts to deter smugglers. They are coupled with Turkey's own dynamics and the EU's externalisation measures, particularly accession talks towards EU membership. The externalization of the EU migration policies also had an impact on reforming immigration policies in Turkey, as discussed above.

Closures at the external borders of the EU have forced Turkey to play the role of gatekeeper in battling irregular migratory movements. In 2002, the readmission protocol between Turkey and Greece was initiated. Nevertheless, there were serious concerns with respect to its implementation due to Turkey's unwillingness to readmit irregular migrants crossing to Greece via Turkey. In December 2013, Turkey signed an RA with the EU after extensive negotiations (İçduygu and Aksel, 2014). Turkish officials were concerned that, without being an EU Member State, Turkey would turn into a 'dumping ground' for apprehended irregular immigrants within the EU.

In the summer of 2015 there were border closures across Europe as a result of the so-called 'migration crisis' and the EU's panic over new arrivals of asylum seekers in the context of open borders along the Balkan route. These events restarted intense migration diplomacy among the EU and Turkey (Karadağ, 2019). The negotiations concluded with the EU–Turkey Joint Action Plan in November 2015 and the EU–Turkey statement of March 2016 on further action points (EC, 2015; EU Council, 2016). The latter marks the current state of the externalisation of EU migration policies in Turkey.

## Trends

Regarding externalisation, one major policy trend is the continuation of migration diplomacy between Turkey and the EU. Currently, albeit not always implemented efficiently, the 2016 Turkey–EU statement constitutes the backbone of the externalisation measures in Turkey.

First, the RA between Turkey and the EU signed in 2013 concerns the return of nationals of EU Member States and Turkey, third-country nationals and stateless persons who have 'entered into, or stayed on, the territory of either side directly arriving from the territory of the other side' (EC, 2013). Turkey signed the RA, in exchange for the initiation of EU–Turkey visa liberalisation dialogue and re-energised Turkey–EU accession talks. As of today, neither of these promises have materialised, and policy trends regarding externalisation were reshaped as Syrian displacement intensified from 2015 onwards.

Second, the 2016 EU–Turkey statement and developments afterwards marked a turning point in the externalisation of EU migration policies in Turkey. The statement had explicit consequences for protection issues in the country; however, there have been debates concerning the validity of the statement as a legal document (Karadağ, 2019). Unlike a formal contract that could be carried to the court, the legal value of this statement has not been clarified (ECRE, 2017). This also marks another trend in Turkey–EU cooperation over migration: informal arrangements rather than formal agreements, cooperation rather than long-term partnership towards EU membership accession, as the possibility of the latter has long since faded away.

As the current instrument framing externalisation of EU migration policies in Turkey, the 2016 statement includes three main parts. First, both parties agreed that all immigrants who illegally enter Greek islands after March 2016 will be sent back to Turkey. Second, in exchange for every returned Syrian to Turkey from the Greek islands, EU Member States will resettle one Syrian refugee from Turkey. Third, to improve the living conditions of refugees, financial aid has been directed to Turkey from the EU. In return, the EU promised Turkey that membership negotiations would resume along with visa liberalisation negotiations for Turkish citizens travelling to Europe.

Following the 2016 statement, the third trend has been the crystallisation of migration diplomacy between Turkey and the EU, in the sense that cooperation over border controls is contingent on political developments. One example of this is the Edirne border events. On 27 February 2020, Turkish authorities announced that they will no longer control border crossings through Turkey, as the country had not received enough support in hosting refugees (HRW, 2020). This encouraged many refugees to move to the Greek–Turkish border (the Edirne border), causing them to be stuck there for several weeks. However, after confirming the first COVID-19 case in Turkey in 2020, multiple measures were implemented to return refugees from the Greek–Turkish border.<sup>11</sup> One can speculate whether the Edirne incident could have lasted for a longer period and turned into a larger border crisis, if the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred.

### Impacts on immigration, emigration, return migration and transit migration

It is hard to measure the impact of RAs as the agreement between Turkey and Greece was only operationalised marginally before the 2016 statement (Gökalp Aras, 2019). Regarding returns under the 2016 Turkey–EU statement, from April 2016 to December 2019, UNHCR in Greece documented 2,001 returnees from the Greek islands. These returnees were from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Bangladesh, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Nigeria and Egypt (UNHCR Greece, 2020). Regarding resettlements, the total number of Syrian refugees resettled from Turkey to EU Member States under the One-for-One scheme amounted to 30,477 refugees as of 22 August 2021 (EC, 2021). The return of irregular migrants from the Greek islands was suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, resettlements from Turkey to the EU continued in July 2020 despite restrictions (ibid.). The current number is still below the initial target of 72,000 resettled migrants set out in the 2016 statement.

Another impact of the increasing externalisation efforts by the EU has been the rising number of RAs signed between Turkey and third countries, as discussed under the Transit migration section.

As an ongoing trend but also as a result of the Edirne event, border crossings to Greece and Bulgaria have reportedly become more violent. Human Rights Watch reported that migrants and asylum seekers who were captured in the

<sup>11</sup> See Üstübici and Karadağ (2019) for an overview of emerging protection issues after the Edirne events and in the first months of the pandemic in 2020.

border area of Pazarkule faced serious violence from Greek security forces. They were beaten, detained, physically and sexually assaulted, stripped, robbed, and then forced to return to Turkey (HRW, 2020). Similarly, the Greek government has been criticised for increasing push-backs in the Aegean Sea and at the land border of the Evros River (Aulsebrook and Pawson, 2021). As the number of Turkish nationals trying to cross the border since 2016 has also risen, the violent encounters at the border impacts transit migrants as well as Turkish nationals trying to flee the country to seek asylum in Europe.

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## Impacts on development

According to experts interviewed for this research, the least problematic component of externalisation is the financial support directed to Turkey to improve the living conditions of Syrian refugees, which also impacts development (Üstübici, 2017). As part of the FRIT, two large-scale aid projects have been administered: the ESSN and the CTE. In addition, the SIHHAT ('health' in Arabic) project is implemented by the Ministry of Health, and the Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES) is implemented by the Ministry of Education as part of FRIT.

The largest proportion of financial aid went to a joint project by the World Food Programme, the Turkish government and the TRC. As the leading humanitarian programme of the EU, the ESSN is a multi-purpose cash transfer scheme providing monthly assistance to refugees in Turkey. Registered families living in Turkey out of camps under IP or TP are eligible for the assistance. The ESSN aims to help vulnerable refugees meet their basic needs and to promote the integration of refugees into national social protection schemes.

The ESSN has helped more than 1.5 million refugees cover part of their most basic needs, and also provides livelihood opportunities for refugees by integrating them in the labour market. As of April 2021, referral programmes have been launched to link beneficiaries of cash assistance with livelihood trainings and opportunities in 19 TRC community centres. These centres, ranging across Turkey, support refugees with work permit assistance, vocational courses and income-generating activities such as sewing, mask production, agricultural trainings, Turkish language courses and other skills trainings. Skilled individuals are guided to relevant job opportunities through coordination with public institutions and other livelihood sector representatives (IFRC, 2022). According to one expert, to ease societal backlash in an increasingly hostile environment, Turkish nationals are also included in the relevant training schemes. Currently, most training schemes target an even split to enrol refugees and Turkish nationals.

The SIHHAT project is another EU-funded project targeting SuTP in Turkey. The project started in 2016 with the aims of supporting and developing basic health services for Syrians. The project aimed to expand the scope of health services in provinces with large Syrian populations by increasing service delivery capacity and quality (SIHHAT project, n.d.). As of September 2019, the project operates in 177 health centres across 29 provinces, which are in principle open to all migrants. However, in practice, the centres mainly serve SuTP registered in the province and less so IP holders, while generally

refusing undocumented migrants. The denial of access has increased, especially since 2019. Non-Arabic speakers, even if registered, face an additional language barrier. Those with IP not only face geographical restrictions but temporal restrictions as well to access healthcare without costs.

Another impact of this project has been the employment of Syrian healthcare workers in Turkey. The project employs eligible Syrian healthcare workers in primary healthcare settings after they have completed a training programme (WHO, 2021). As of December 2020, a total of 3,422 healthcare personnel have been employed within the scope of the project (SIHHAT project, n.d.).

Another project under the framework of FRIT is PIKTES. The main aim of this is to enhance the access of Syrian children under TP to the education system in Turkey and to promote their social cohesion.

By the end of 2020, as one expert stated, the resources under FRIT have been used to fund several projects for the protection and adoption of displaced communities in Turkey, with a particular focus on Syrians. New projects are also being designed using FRIT resources. For instance, one new project targets the most vulnerable and disadvantaged beneficiaries/people under TP or IP with a higher value of cash transfers. The aim of these new projects is to increase the employability of refugees by supporting their livelihoods and enabling their transition from unconditional cash aid to sustainable solutions. However, this component of the project could not be implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Key incoherence across policies

The uneasy coexistence of various measures to manage migration mark the major incoherence within the externalisation of EU migration policies. This includes control measures targeting the stopping, containment and eventual return of refugees and migrants, the integration of cash-aid measures, vocational training and efforts to promote social cohesion.

Most projects funded under EU externalisation target the most vulnerable sections of the refugee population and support them through humanitarian aid. The impact of such programmes on integration in an increasingly hostile context may be counterproductive, however. First, though the programmes are useful in helping the vulnerable population to survive, they are not designed with long-term integration strategies in mind. Second, the increasing backlash against refugees and migrants in Turkey jeopardises the success of these programmes.

### Interaction with development policies

Since 2016, the interaction of migration and development policies is most visible on measures related to socioeconomic integration of SuTP. The aim with these policies is to foster the participation of SuTP in socioeconomic life and improve their sustainable livelihood opportunities by increasing their participation in the formal labour market and facilitate social cohesion. The ESSN programme, launched in December 2016, is one such example.

Improving Labour Market Integration of Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Turkey is another project which aims to enhance the livelihoods and social cohesion of Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey by fostering labour market integration and inclusive economic growth. Experts observed that the impact of vocational trainings and language training for formal labour market integration has remained limited. However, there is a successful example. The Mahir Eller Project, which was initiated in December 2017, aims to increase the employment prospects of both Turkish citizens and SuTP via certification of their existing vocational skills. As part of the project, 15,000 beneficiaries have so far received vocational certification after passing their related examinations, and 3,000 beneficiaries with vocational certification have been employed (Mahir Eller Project, n.d.). This and similar projects are in line with the development policies of Turkey, as they seek to fulfil the need for a semi-skilled workforce in the national labour market.

## Main development policies

### The selected policies

Turkey has several development policies which have the potential to affect both internal and international migration patterns and the impact of migration on development. Three policy areas are summarised below, two of which have already been touched upon in this paper: 1) those which relate to regional development, reducing socioeconomic development disparities between regions; 2) those which relate to R&D and innovation; and 3) those which relate to human capital.

Policies related to regional development are explained in the Internal migration, Main policies and Trends sections. According to one expert, reducing socioeconomic development disparities between regions is one of the priority policy areas of the Turkish government. As such, it is a horizontal and cross-cutting policy issue that is touched upon in all other policy areas. Turkey has regional development administrations, the most important of which is the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP), whose GAP Action Plan (2008–2012) aimed to accelerate investments for economic growth, social development and employment generation, thus creating a higher level of welfare for the people of south-eastern Anatolia. In addition, there are 26 development agencies across Turkey working under the auspices of the Directorate General of Development Agencies. These agencies have been established as local partners with strong institutional capacity to introduce mechanisms that would eliminate development disparities between regions. One expert also mentioned that these agencies have different programmes in different regions that especially target youth and university students to promote their contribution to the development of the country. The Directorate also has investment support offices in each city.

Secondly, the Turkish government has been trying to improve the R&D and innovation infrastructure and capacity of the country through various programmes. The government aims to increase product quality and productivity in the manufacturing and industrial sectors, to promote high

value-added production and services, and to increase the competitiveness of the overall national economy in the global market. As part of these efforts, the share of R&D expenditures in GDP increased from 0.82% in 2013 to 0.96% in 2017 (Presidency for Strategy and Budget, 2019). Additionally, Law No. 6550 on Supporting Research Infrastructure was enacted in 2014 to scale up and streamline research infrastructure.

Third, the Turkish government seeks to increase the number of qualified workers and their employment in the labour market. In turn, this will boost socioeconomic development by ensuring a nationwide technological transformation and increasing Turkey's competitiveness within the global market. As reiterated in different parts of the 11th Development Plan (ibid.), policies cover the provision of education and vocational training, and funding opportunities for people residing in the country, as well as initiatives to attract skilled and highly skilled foreigners and Turkish nationals living abroad with favourable working environments and funding opportunities (for more detail see the Return migration section).

### Interactions with migration-related policies

Policies on regional development also serve the goal of decreasing internal migration trends towards the metropolitan areas of western and coastal Turkey, creating a more spatially and socioeconomically balanced country. Furthermore, this goal is explicitly stated in the government's Development Plans.

The other two development policy areas on R&D and human capital interact with migration policies to attract highly qualified personnel to prevent and reverse brain drain. In other words, the return migration of highly skilled Turkish nationals abroad is fostered via favourable working environments and the promotion of R&D and innovation. These skilled human resources are expected to contribute to the productivity and competitiveness of the Turkish economy through value-added products and to promote the country's science and technology driven development.

Since 2016, the interaction of migration and development policies has been most visible around measures related to the integration of SuTP in Turkey. In 2018, the Turkish government adopted The Strategy Document on Harmonisation and the National Action Plan (2018-2023) (DGMM, 2018), which became a significant integration policy instrument to initiate communication between refugees, host communities and service providers, and to support local groups in receiving refugees. However, experts observed that the impact of vocational and language training in formal labour market integration has remained limited. Furthermore, even though increasing qualified human resources is among Turkey's major development policies, there are problems in integrating the highly qualified Syrian population into the formal labour market, partly because their diplomas and other credentials are not recognised.

### Examples of impact on migration

The impact of policies that aim to grow the highly skilled labour force in Turkey is covered in the section on Impacts on return migration. TÜBİTAK's

programmes have been particularly effective in promoting the return of Turkish scholars. Additionally, one expert noted that several Turkish people from abroad returned to work in the manufacturing of the first Turkish-made electric car (TOGG). The same expert added that some highly skilled foreign citizens have migrated to Turkey to work in the petroleum and natural gas industry.

## Any additional information related to COVID-19

After Turkey announced the first case of COVID-19 on 11 March 2020, the government called on citizens to stay home unless necessary. In the beginning of the pandemic, this call was a recommendation rather than an enforced mandate. However, as the number of deaths and confirmed cases rose, the government enforced rules to restrict access to public areas and initiated lockdowns during evenings, weekends, and public holidays from April to June 2020. Towards the end of 2020, a second wave of COVID-19 came, with cases reaching 30,000 per day in November. In March 2021, Turkey faced a third wave of COVID-19, leading to more than 60,000 registered cases per day in late April. Before the third wave, the Turkish government did not implement a complete lockdown of economic production. Measures had been limited to restrictions on the mobility of elderly (65+) citizens and children under 20 years old, restaurant and café closures, and curfews in the evenings and at weekends. However, due to the skyrocketing number of cases, the Turkish government announced a three-week full lockdown effective between 29 April 2021 and 17 May 2021.

During the summer of 2021, the COVID-19 vaccination programme accelerated. According to data provided via the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Vaccination Information Platform, as of April 2022, over 53 million people out of a population of 84.3 million had been fully vaccinated in Turkey (MoH, n.d.). According to The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre (CRC) (n.d.), there had been just over 15 million confirmed cases and 98,751 deaths at that time. By Spring 2022, COVID-19 regulations and restrictions were eased.

According to the World Bank (n.d.), in Turkey the COVID-19 crisis has deepened gender pay gaps and increased youth unemployment along with the poverty rate. With regards to refugees, according to one expert, within 12 regions of Turkey the ratio of Syrians who lost their jobs compared to Turkish citizens was 3:1, while the ratio of those on unpaid leave was 4:1. These observations are also supported by other research revealing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Syrian compared to Turkish households in the early weeks of the pandemic (Elçi et al., 2021; see also Üstübcü and Karadağ, 2020).

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