



## Revisiting and going beyond the EU-Turkey migration agreement of 2016:

an opportunity for Greece to overcome being just “Europe’s aspis”

TURKEY PROGRAMME

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## an opportunity for Greece to overcome being just “Europe’s aspis”

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### Summary

- A conflict and tension dominated 2020 in Greek-Turkish and EU-Turkish relations appears to be subsiding and the European Council statement of March 25 offers a possible framework for a return to dialogue and diplomacy.
- This framework, primarily focused on the Eastern Mediterranean, also provides room for revisiting the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, a statement that had many opponents and whose implementation faced multiple grievances and recriminations from both sides.
- In the interim, however, the emerging positive climate offers the possibility to expand cooperation in a relatively successful but inadequately appreciated part of the EU-Turkey statement known as the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT).
- Expanded cooperation must consider that, with no prospects of resettlement and significant return to Syria, the presence of 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey has become a protracted one. This calls for FRIT to shift from a humanitarian assistance to a developmental focus and help create livelihood opportunities for refugees to improve their self-reliance and social inclusion into their host communities.
- The external dimension of the European Commission’s “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” proposal falls short of offering constructive policy ideas able to transcend the EU’s long-standing policy of externalizing the cost and responsibility of managing its external borders to countries outside the EU.
- The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) adopted in December 2018 and endorsed by all EU members, except Hungary, advocates, inter alia, for the promotion of “economic opportunities, decent work, job creation and entrepreneurship programs for host community members and refugees” in countries hosting them.
- A carefully crafted arrangement between the EU and Turkey granting concessions that would enable Turkey to expand its agricultural exports, not covered by the customs union, to the EU can help spur sustainable employment both for refugees and locals.
- Other policy suggestions, ranging from revamped resettlement to exploring avenues of safe return to Syria for those interested, as well as funding for humanitarian assistance for the IDPs amassed on the Turkish border will need to be incorporated into an EU-Turkey package deal to help address the dilemma of relative gains and achieve a true partnership and a “win-win” outcome.
- There is an important role for Greece to play, especially if Greece, as a frontline country in migration management, would like to play a role that is not limited to being just “Europe’s ‘shield’”: a role that has not been particularly benevolent for Greece’s image in terms of human and refugee rights.
- Greece, as a country with an important stake in the EU’s migration policy, could pursue these policy ideas through the decision-making channels of the EU.

## Introduction

*“...this report argues that the emerging positive climate offers the possibility to explore expanding cooperation in a relatively successful but inadequately appreciated part of the EU- Turkey statement of 2016 known as the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT). Advancing cooperation in this area could contribute to mutual confidence building and have a positive spillover into the other more complicated issue areas in the migration domain.”*

Calling the year 2020 in Greek-Turkish relations an *annus horribilis* would not be an exaggeration. The Turkish president’s decision to realize his long-standing threat of “opening the borders” and precipitating a major humanitarian and political crisis on the Greek-Turkish land border set the tone for the rest of the year, a year which was marked by Turkey becoming a source of “poly-crises” engendering “security threats, risks and challenges in Greece’s immediate security environment.”<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, 2021 started with prospects of possible improvements as an initial round of Greek-Turkish exploratory talks began in January. It was preceded by a video conference call between the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.<sup>2</sup> On the occasion Erdoğan, somewhat unexpectedly, remarked that “Turkey wanted to turn a new page in its relations with the EU in the new year” and that he saw “Turkey’s future in Europe.” He dispatched, right away, his Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to Brussels to meet with Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign policy chief, to get the so-called ball rolling.

The March 2021 European Council call to “enhance cooperation” with Turkey “subject to the established conditionalities” builds on these initial positive developments.<sup>3</sup> Beside the heavy focus on the Eastern Mediterranean, the customs union and migration management are identified as two areas for possible improvement. Cooperation in Turkish-EU relations had long been squeezed into these two issue areas in recent years, though both sides have had their long list of complaints and grievances. Nevertheless, there is general recognition that for all its problems the customs union has been beneficial to both sides and that it needs to be modernized.<sup>4</sup> There is also a rich body of commentary that sees the modernization of the customs union as a tool that could help improve EU-Turkish relations, including with Greece.<sup>5</sup> In the migration area the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, as it enters its fifth year, has become the reference point with respect to managing relations between both sides.<sup>6</sup> It too has suffered from complaints from both sides and encountered challenges that have brought relations to a breaking point on several occasions. Addressing and overcoming these challenges will call for extensive diplomatic effort, good will and take considerable time.

In the meantime, this report argues that the emerging positive climate offers the possibility to explore expanding cooperation in a relatively successful but inadequately

<sup>1</sup> Panayotis Tsakonas, “Greek Foreign and Security Policy in 2021,” in [2021 OUTLOOK: Special Edition](#), (Athens: ELIAMEP, December 31, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> “Videoconference with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen,” Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, January 9, 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/123508/videoconference-with-president-of-the-european-commission-ursula-von-der-leyen>.

<sup>3</sup> “Statement of the Members of the European Council,” March 25, 2021, Brussels, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> “Evaluation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union,” Report No. 85830-TR, (Washington, DC: World Bank, March 2014), <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/turkey/tr-eu-customs-union-eng.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Sinan Ülgen, “Trade As Turkey’s EU Anchor,” *Carnegie Europe Paper*, December 13, 2017; <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/12/13/trade-as-turkey-s-eu-anchor-pub-75002>; Nathalie Tocci and Dimitar Bechev, “EU should keep Turkey close and Erdoğan even closer,” *Politico*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-should-keep-turkey-close-recep-tayyip-erdogan-even-closer/amp/>; Doruk Aybay, “The Modernization of the European Union’s Customs Union with Turkey,” *SWP (CATS) Working Paper*, No. 05, September, 2020, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/CATS\\_Working\\_Paper\\_Nr\\_5\\_Doruk\\_Arbay.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/CATS_Working_Paper_Nr_5_Doruk_Arbay.pdf) and Panayotis Tsakonas and Athanasios Manis, “Modernising the EU-Turkey Customs Union: The Greek Factor,” *ELIAMEP Policy Paper*, No. 35, December 2020, <https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Policy-paper-35-Tsakonas-Manis-06.07-final-1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> “EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016,” European Council, March 18, 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

*“...the so-called “ground floor,” of the “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” proposal does not offer much guidance on how to arrive at such a “win-win” solution. It fails to offer convincing policy ideas that transcend the EU’s long-standing policy of externalizing the cost and responsibility of managing its external borders. Instead, this report will explore policy ideas from the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).”*

appreciated part of the statement known as the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT).<sup>7</sup> Advancing cooperation in this area could contribute to mutual confidence building and have a positive spillover into the other more complicated issue areas in the migration domain. There are five realities that makes the need for such a narrowly defined cooperation indispensable in terms of the interest of both sides, but also in terms of striving to live up to the global refugee protection standards. Firstly, the FRIT set up to implement the disbursement of funds promised in the statement has positively impacted the situation on the ground for the refugees, especially in terms of meeting their basic needs. Secondly, the implementation of FRIT has created a poorly acknowledged but impressively constructive public space of cooperation between European actors (member states, the Commission, European NGOs), Turkish stakeholders (government agencies, municipalities, and local civil society) and international organizations. Thirdly, the refugee numbers are fast approaching four million, and with each passing year their likelihood of returning to Syria is diminishing. Their presence in Turkey has become protracted.<sup>8</sup> This calls for a new momentum and innovative avenues of cooperation to enhance their self-reliance. Fourthly, as the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees approaches, it must be remembered that the protection of refugees is an international responsibility calling for burden-sharing and not responsibility shifting. Finally, and beyond altruism, it is in the interest of both the EU and Turkey to cooperate, as challenging as it might be, and find, in the words of the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, a “win-win solution going forward” in addressing this enduring reality.<sup>9</sup>

This report considers that the external dimension, the so-called “ground floor,” of the “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” proposal does not offer much guidance on how to arrive at such a “win-win” solution.<sup>10</sup> It fails to offer convincing policy ideas that transcend the EU’s long-standing policy of externalizing the cost and responsibility of managing its external borders. Instead, this report will explore policy ideas from the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).<sup>11</sup> Adopted in December 2018, the GCR recognizes that the traditional refugee protection system based on the 1951 Geneva Convention is “broken”,<sup>12</sup> and that 85 percent of the refugees find themselves in developing countries, while 77 percent of these refugees are in a protracted situation.<sup>13</sup>

Against this reality, the GCR calls on the international community to work together — in the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing — to improve the self-reliance of refugees and the resilience of their host communities, as well as help transform refugees from a humanitarian burden to a development and economic opportunity. To achieve this, it calls, *inter alia*, for the promotion of “economic opportunities, decent work, job

<sup>7</sup> “The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey,” European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/migration\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/migration_en)

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR defines a protracted situation as one when refugees have been displaced without a durable solution (such as voluntary return to their home countries following the resolution of conflicts, resettlement, or local integration) for more than five years, “Conclusion on Protracted Refugee Situations No. 109 (LXI) – 2009,” UNHCR Executive Committee 61<sup>st</sup> session, Extraordinary Meeting, December 8, 2009, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/exconc/4b322bca9/conclusion-protracted-refugee-situations.html>

<sup>9</sup> For the remarks of the Greek PM see Helena Smith, “Greece hopes EU-Turkey talks will ease tension over refugee crisis,” *The Guardian*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/greece-hopes-eu-turkey-talks-will-ease-tension-over-refugee-crisis>.

<sup>10</sup> “Speech by Vice-President Schinas on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum,” European Commission, September 23, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_20\\_1736](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_1736). “Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on asylum and migration management and amending Council Directive (EC) 2003/109 and the proposed Regulation (EU) XXX/XXX [Asylum and Migration Fund],” European Commission, Brussels, 23.9.2020, COM(2020) 610 final, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-regulation-asylum-migration\\_en-1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-regulation-asylum-migration_en-1.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> The text of the GCR can be accessed from “Part II Global Compact on Refugees,” General Assembly Official Records Seventy-third Session Supplement No. 12, [https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR\\_English.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*, (London: Allen Lane, 2017), pp. 133-4.

<sup>13</sup> “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019”, (UNHCR, 2020), p. 23, <https://www.unhcr.org/See200e37.pdf>



“...the GCR calls on the international community to work together – in the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing – to improve the self-reliance of refugees and the resilience of their host communities, as well as help transform refugees from a humanitarian burden to a development and economic opportunity.”

creation and entrepreneurship programs for host community members and refugees” in refugee hosting countries. One specific policy tool it advocates, to bring this about, is the extension of preferential trade arrangements “for goods and sectors with a high level of refugee participation in the labor force.”<sup>14</sup> All EU member countries, apart from Hungary, have endorsed the GCR. Though the GCR is not a legally binding document, self-interest, not to mention moral obligation, calls for its implementation if secondary movements of refugees as well as the human and political toll reminiscent of the 2015-16 European migration crisis are to be averted.

To explore how this policy tool can be transformed into a “win-win” outcome for the EU, Greece, and Turkey, but especially the refugees, this report is divided into four parts. The first section discusses the events and the domestic developments that led to the crisis on the Greek-Turkish border early in 2020. It is followed by an assessment of the shortcomings, successes, and lessons to be drawn from the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement of 2016. The third section examines the current refugee situation in Turkey and discusses how the country’s capacity to absorb 3.6 million Syrian refugees, who are entering their tenth year of displacement, is under strain. The picture is further complicated by the presence of an additional close to 330,000 non-Syrian refugees and asylum seekers,<sup>15</sup> not to mention an ever-increasing pool of irregular migrants stuck in the country. The final section offers a set of recommendations derived primarily but not solely from the GCR that could be incorporated into a revised EU-Turkey statement and/or negotiated as a standalone agreement. The paper concludes by suggesting ways in which Greece could help and play a role in the EU’s migration management that is not limited to being just “Europe’s ‘shield’.”<sup>16</sup>

## Section I: The border crisis and its lessons

The sense that 2020 would be an *annus horribilis* was triggered when President Erdoğan announced late in February that his government would not hold back those refugees and migrants who wanted to leave the country and make their way to the EU. He had long been threatening to “open the borders” and expressing his discomfort with the *quid pro quo* embedded in the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016 (to be discussed in the next section). As early as in the fall of the same year, during his address to the United Nations General Assembly, he delivered a scathing criticism of the EU for closing its doors to refugees. He argued, showing a graph to the plenary, that “Turkey has successfully fulfilled its commitments within the framework of its agreement with the European Union. Nevertheless, we regret that the promises made by the European Union ... has been nearly forgotten, and artificial excuses are raised all the time...We expect them to keep their promises.”<sup>17</sup> These remarks set the tone for employing the refugee issue as leverage in Turkey’s ever worsening relations with the EU. Yet, it was the confluence of a specific set of domestic and external developments that would eventually culminate in Erdoğan putting his threats into effect.

The immediate trigger was the urgency to avert public attention away from the news report of the killing of at least 33 Turkish soldiers in northern Idlib, Syria’s last rebel-held

<sup>14</sup> “Part II Global Compact on Refugees,” p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> “Turkey Fact Sheet,” February 2021, UNHCR, Ankara, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2021/03/Bi-Annual-Fact-Sheet-2021-02-Turkeyf.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Rankin, “Migration: EU praises Greece as ‘shield’ after Turkey opens border,” *The Guardian*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/03/migration-eu-praises-greece-as-shield-after-turkey-opens-border>.

<sup>17</sup> “President Erdoğan Addresses the UN General Assembly,” Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, September 20, 2019, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/52361/president-erdogan-addresses-the-un-general-assembly>.

“Erdoğan’s narrative, known as “*Ensar-ı Muhacir*,” [...] had helped mobilize considerable support for Syrian refugees, especially among his large electoral base at the time. However, the influence of this narrative weakened as years went by and even sporadic acts of violence against Syrian refugees began to occur.”

bastion, by the Syrian army and its allies.<sup>18</sup> The offensive in December 2019 had displaced an estimated one million people, the “biggest single displacement” since the start of the conflict in Syria, towards Turkey’s border, aggravating an already dire humanitarian situation.<sup>19</sup> The urgency of the situation also led to the calculation that the opening of the border might compel the EU to support Turkey’s long-standing calls for the creation of a safe zone in northern Syria. Early in September Erdoğan had advocated the idea of a safe zone on the Syrian side of the border to where at least one million refugees could be returned and had threatened to open the borders if the EU would not support the plan.<sup>20</sup> Then the following month he promised his Justice and Development Party (AKP) members of parliament that “We will open the gates and send 3.6 million refugees your way”.<sup>21</sup>

Placating public opinion was another important factor. In the initial years of the arrival of Syrian refugees, Turkish society received them pretty much with open arms. Erdoğan’s narrative, known as “*Ensar-ı Muhacir*,” drawing parallels to the era when the Prophet Mohammad and his congregation had to flee Mecca for Medina and enjoy protection and hospitality from its residents, had helped mobilize considerable support, especially among his large electoral base at the time.<sup>22</sup> However, the influence of this narrative weakened as years went by and even sporadic acts of violence against Syrian refugees began to occur. Additionally, in the early years of the Syrian crisis there existed the widely held belief, strongly propagated by the then minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, that the Assad regime would not last long and would be replaced by a new government led by the opposition that Turkey supported. Hence the public expectation was that the refugees’ stay would be temporary.

However, as the conflict in Syria dragged out and the number of Syrian refugees reached ever increasing numbers, the public mood changed dramatically. In sharp contrast to 2014 when almost 58 percent of respondents objected to the statement “the Refugees should be sent back to their country,”<sup>23</sup> a survey from July 2019 showed that more than 83 percent of the respondents called for the return of all refugees and disagreed with the government’s policy of hosting them.<sup>24</sup> This disagreement with the government is seen, including by a former AKP member of parliament, as a primary reason for Erdoğan’s party performing poorly in the local elections of March 2019, losing major metropolitan cities long held by the AKP to the opposition.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Berkay Mandıracı, “Sharing the Burden: Revisiting the EU-Turkey Migration Deal,” *Commentary*, Europe and Central Asia, International Crisis Group, March 13, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/sharing-burden-revisiting-eu-turkey-migration-deal>

<sup>19</sup> “As north-west Syria violence reaches ‘horrifying’ new level, UN relief chief says ceasefire is only option,” *UN News*, February 17, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057551> and “Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic,” Issue 08, January 28, 2020, OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/humanitarian-update-syrian-arab-republic-issue-08-28-january-2020-enar>

<sup>20</sup> “Ak Parti Genişletilmiş İl Başkanları Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma,” Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, September 5, 2019, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/109531/ak-parti-genisletilmis-il-baskanlari-toplantisinda-yaptiklari-konusma>

<sup>21</sup> “Turkey’s Erdoğan threatens to send Syrian refugees to Europe,” *Reuters*, October 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-europe/turkeys-erdogan-threatens-to-send-syrian-refugees-to-europe-idUSKBN1WP1ED>.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of his narrative and link to domestic politics see Rabia Karakaya Polat, “Religious solidarity, historical mission and moral superiority: construction of external and internal ‘others’ in AKP’s discourses on Syrian refugees in Turkey,” *Critical Discourse Studies*, Vol. 15, issue 5, (2018) and Asli Selin Okyay, “Turkey’s post-2011 approach to its Syrian border and its implications for domestic politics,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 4, (July 2017).

<sup>23</sup> M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Integration Research*, (Ankara: Hacettepe University Migration Policy Research Center, December 2014), p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> “PIAR anketi: AKP’lilerin yüzde 33’ü merkez sağda yeni bir parti istiyor,” *T24*, July 19, 2019, <https://t24.com.tr/foto-haber/piar-dan-siyasi-gundem-arastirmasi-akp-lilerin-yuzde-33-u-merkez-sagda-yeni-bir-parti-istiyor,8276/20>.

<sup>25</sup> Dogachan Dagi, “The EU–Turkey Migration Deal: Performance and Prospects,” *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 25, Issue 2 (2020), p. 212 and Suat Kınıklıoğlu, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Changing Attitudes and Fortunes,” *SWP (CATS) Comment*, No. 5, February 2020, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2020C05\\_Kiniklioglu.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2020C05_Kiniklioglu.pdf). For a rich discussion of the impact of Syrian refugees on public attitudes and electoral behavior see M. Murat Erdoğan, “‘Securitization from Society’ and ‘Social Acceptance’: Political Party-Based Approaches in Turkey to Syrian Refugees,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, No. 68, (2020).

*“In sharp contrast to 2014 when almost 58 percent of respondents objected to the statement ‘the Refugees should be sent back to their country,’ a survey from July 2019 showed that more than 83 percent of the respondents called for the return of all refugees and disagreed with the government’s policy of hosting them.”*

*“Recriminations flew in both directions. EU member states denounced ‘Turkey’s use of migratory pressure for political purposes.’ Turkish officials accused the EU of ‘hypocrisy’ for violating the same fundamental rights it continuously criticized Ankara for disrespecting.”*

Not surprisingly, shortly after the AKP candidate was defeated during the re-run local election in Istanbul in June, the government hastily announced a policy demanding that Syrian refugees residing outside their initial places of registration return to their assigned locations. This was accompanied by numerous returns to Syria that many criticized as amounting to refoulement, in violation of the 1951 Geneva Convention.<sup>26</sup> In an effort to show to the public the government’s intention to change course, at the 74<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Erdoğan called for the international community to support his plan for a safe zone to resettle “one to two million refugees” and presented an elaborate construction project to house them.<sup>27</sup> His repeated threats directed to the EU to “open the borders” need to be seen in this particular domestic political context. Very dramatically, in October 2019 he announced the launching of a military operation into northern Syria ostensibly to prevent terrorism as well as to create a safe zone to return millions of Syrian refugees.

The public discontent with refugees was also enhanced by the slowdown in Turkey’s economic growth coupled with growing unemployment. The economy had contracted from an 11.2 percent growth rate in 2011 when refugees first began to arrive, to 0.9 percent in 2019.<sup>28</sup> Unemployment reached its highest level since 2015 increasing from 9.7 to 13.9 percent in July 2019 before barely falling to 13.7 percent, with a total of 4.4 million people out of work.<sup>29</sup> Against such an economic picture, Erdoğan’s frequent practice of referring to the USD 40 billion spent on refugees and complaints that the EU was slow in delivering the funds promised to Turkey aggravated matters. His statement at the Global Forum on Refugees in Geneva in December 2019 is likely to have engendered the pressure to act on his promises of opening the borders as the public’s skepticism about the wisdom of the EU-Turkey deal intensified.<sup>30</sup>

The decision to open the borders precipitated a scramble among refugees and migrants to the Greek-Turkish border. The situation quickly evolved into a major humanitarian crisis, once Greece suspended asylum procedures and forcefully prevented migrants from crossing into Greece.<sup>31</sup> Recriminations flew in both directions. EU member states denounced “Turkey’s use of migratory pressure for political purposes.” Turkish officials accused the EU of “hypocrisy” for violating the same fundamental rights it continuously criticized Ankara for disrespecting.<sup>32</sup>

The crisis came to an end as precipitously as it had flared up. Shortly after the first COVID-19 case was reported in Turkey, on March 18 the government announced the closure of its land borders with both Greece and Bulgaria, as a precaution against the spread of the virus, and began to move refugees and migrants away from the border. In

<sup>26</sup> Pinar Tremblay, “Are Syrians in Turkey no longer Erdoğan’s ‘brothers’?” *Al-Monitor*, July 29, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/07/turkey-syria-refugees-are-no-longer-erdogan-s-brothers.html> and “Turkey Forcibly Returning Syrians to Danger,” Human Rights Watch, July 26, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/26/turkey-forcibly-returning-syrians-danger>.

<sup>27</sup> “President Erdoğan Addresses the UN General Assembly.”

<sup>28</sup> GDP growth “annual %” – Turkey, World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=TR>

<sup>29</sup> “İşgücü İstatistikleri, Aralık 2019,” *Haber Bülteni*, TÜİK, March 10, 2020, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Labour-Force-Statistics-December%202019-33783>. For a discussion of the persistence of unemployment in Turkey and its relationship to Syrian refugees see Gökçe Uysal, Hande Paker, and Selin Pelek, “Labor Market Challenges in Turkey,” in Asaf Savas Akat and Seyfettin Gürsel (eds.), *Turkish Economy at the Crossroads: Facing the Challenges Ahead* (World Scientific, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> “Küresel Mülteci Forumu’nda Yaptıkları Konuşma,” Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, December 17, 2019, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/113993/kuresel-multeci-forumu-nda-yaptiklari-konusma>.

<sup>31</sup> Kristina Jovanovski, “On Turkish-Greek border, desperate migrants find confusion and chaos,” *NBC News*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/turkish-greek-border-desperate-migrants-find-confusion-chaos-n1150501>.

<sup>32</sup> “Statement of the Foreign Affairs Council,” European Council, March 6, 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/06/statement-of-the-foreign-affairs-council-on-syria-and-turkey/> and “Why did Turkey open borders for refugees to Europe?” *TRTWorld*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/why-did-turkey-open-borders-for-refugees-to-europe-34240>.

*“Erdoğan failed to achieve his objective of ‘sending 3.6 million refugees’ the EU’s way. The crisis further aggravated already poor EU-Turkish relations. However, the EU’s image did not come out unscathed either.”*

the end few migrants made it across. It is difficult to establish the actual number but one Turkish refugee advocacy group put the number at much less than 3,000, citing the UNHCR, significantly less than the 150,000 claimed by the Turkish government.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, most of those who tried to cross the border were not Syrian refugees but nationals of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan and Somalia, as well as Turkish citizens.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, Erdoğan failed to achieve his objective of “sending 3.6 million refugees” the EU’s way. The crisis further aggravated already poor EU-Turkish relations. However, the EU’s image did not come out unscathed either. The emphasis put on border security over human rights did not help with the EU’s already withering reputation as a normative power.<sup>35</sup> The only positive outcome, as challenging as the realization might be, was the prospect of finding “a common understanding of what is missing and what is already in place” in the EU-Turkey 2016 statement and “then to implement the missing elements” noted by Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, after her meeting with Erdoğan.<sup>36</sup> Her remark that “Migrants need support, Greece needs support but also Turkey needs support, and this involves finding a path forward with Turkey” is promising. The next section assesses the EU-Turkey statement to identify these “missing elements.”

## Section II: Assessing the EU-Turkey Statement

The EU-Turkey statement emerged because of more than a million refugees of Syrian and other origins pouring into the EU via Turkey and other routes. It provoked a humanitarian catastrophe and tragedies of epic proportions, leading one writer to resemble it to a “New Odyssey.”<sup>37</sup>

This massive secondary movement triggered “panic” that it would threaten the very pillars of the EU and weaken it “permanently and radically”.<sup>38</sup> This engendered a need to urgently find an arrangement with Turkey to stop or slow down the flow of migrants, to mitigate the adverse effect on the institutions of the EU. This panic coincided with a moment when the government in Turkey also began to recognize that the developments in Syria were not promising in terms of prospects of return for refugees and that the “burden” of hosting refugees was becoming politically and economically difficult to sustain.

The then minister of foreign affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, had in 2013 noted that for Turkey the psychological limit was 100,000 refugees and that beyond it Turkey would need international support.<sup>39</sup> The numbers by the end of 2015 had reached over 2.5 million

<sup>33</sup> “Bakan Soylu 150 bin, BM 347 dedi,” *Mülteci Medyası*, April 9, 2020, <https://multecimedyasi.org/2020/04/09/bakan-soylu-150-bin-bm-347-dedi/>

<sup>34</sup> “Sharing the Burden: Revisiting the EU-Turkey Migration Deal.”

<sup>35</sup> “The EU–Turkey Migration Deal: Performance and Prospects”. A similar point is raised in Angeliki Dimitriadi, “[Refugees at the gate of Europe](#),” *ELIAMEP Policy Brief*, No. 112, April 22, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> “Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel, following their meeting with the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,” European Commission, March 9, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_20\\_429](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_429)

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Kingsley, *The New Odyssey: The Story of the Twenty-First Century Refugee Crisis*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.)

<sup>38</sup> Betts and Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> “Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu’nun Bulgaristan Dışişleri Bakanı İle Yaptığı Ortak Basın Toplantısı,” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 26, 2013, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu-nun-bulgaristan-disisleri-bakani-ile-yaptigi-basin-toplantisi\\_-26-ekim-2013\\_-ankara.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu-nun-bulgaristan-disisleri-bakani-ile-yaptigi-basin-toplantisi_-26-ekim-2013_-ankara.tr.mfa).



*“...the implementation of the statement was effective both in terms of improving the EU’s border security concerns and sharing some of Turkey’s burden in meeting the needs of the refugees. The number of illegal crossings across the Aegean Sea dropped dramatically, from about 855,000 in 2015, to just under 30,000 in 2017.”*

and close to \$8 billion was spent on their upkeep, with limited international support.<sup>40</sup> There was also growing public discomfort with the cost of the refugees on the economy and their taxes being spent on them.<sup>41</sup> Independently from the refugee issue, on the Turkish side, for domestic political reasons, there was also an urge to revive the sagging accession process and resolve the long-standing visa liberalization issue.

It is against this picture that both sides’ interests converged, and they were compelled to negotiate first the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan in October 2015<sup>42</sup> and then the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016. The primary objective was to curb the sudden surge of irregular crossings into Greece in 2015 and 2016. Turkey increased border security and Greece was promised the possibility to return “all new irregular migrants” to Turkey. In return, Turkey would receive two tranches of 3 billion euros in grants to support the refugees and enhance its border security. Additionally, to encourage regularized paths to asylum, the deal envisaged the resettlement of one registered asylum seeker from Turkey for each irregular migrant returned from Greece. Finally, Turkey’s EU accession process was also to be re-energized through a visa liberalization program, and a new chapter in the membership negotiation process was to be opened.

The statement met with some sharp criticism ranging from those calling it a “dirty deal” to those who saw it as product of raw cynicism that resembled “horse trading” at the price of “the rights and dignity of some of the world’s most vulnerable people.”<sup>43</sup> Human rights organizations objected on the grounds that Turkey was not a safe third country for returning refugees.<sup>44</sup> There were also question marks raised on the actual legality of the statement in terms of EU rules governing the making of international agreements.<sup>45</sup> Others argued that the arrangement risked undermining the 1951 Convention and was a manifestation of growing externalization of migration controls that contradicts international refugee law at large.<sup>46</sup>

Subsequently, there were also grievances from both sides with respect to the implementation of its terms. On the EU side the greatest complaint was about the periodic threats coming from Erdoğan to “open the borders” and let refugees stream towards Europe. There have also been reciprocal complaints concerning the one-to-one scheme, the European side expressing displeasure about the low numbers of irregular migrants being accepted by Turkey while the Turkish side complained that resettlement of refugees from Turkey remained low. In Turkey, the greatest criticism came from

<sup>40</sup> “Turkey Has Spent Nearly \$8 Billion Caring For 2.2 Million Syrian Refugees,” *Huffington Post*, September 18, 2015, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/turkey-syrian-refugees\\_n\\_55fbd728e4b08820d9183073](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/turkey-syrian-refugees_n_55fbd728e4b08820d9183073).

<sup>41</sup> Erdoğan, *Syrians in Turkey*, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> “EU-Turkey joint action plan,” European Commission, October 15, 2015, [https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-15-5860\\_en.htm](https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5860_en.htm).

<sup>43</sup> Matteo Garavoglia, “The EU-Turkey dirty deal on migrants: Can Europe redeem itself?,” Brookings Institution, March 14, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/03/14/the-eu-turkey-dirty-deal-on-migrants-can-europe-redeem-itself/> and “EU Turkey Summit: EU and Turkish leaders deal death blow to the right to seek asylum,” Amnesty International, March 8, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/03/eu-turkey-summit-reaction/>.

<sup>44</sup> Emanuela Roman, Theodore Baird, and Talia Radcliffe, “Why Turkey is Not a “Safe Country,” Statewatch Analysis, February, 2016, <https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/analyses/no-283-why-turkey-is-not-a-safe-country.pdf> and Bill Frelick, “Is Turkey Safe for Refugees?” *Policy Review*, Human Rights Watch, March 22, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/22/turkey-safe-refugees>

<sup>45</sup> “EU-Turkey deal: who is responsible? Not the EU, says the Court of Justice,” Statewatch, March 1, 2017, <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/march/eu-turkey-deal-who-is-responsible-not-the-eu-says-the-court-of-justice/> and Julia Roberts, “The EU-Turkey Statement – Questions on Legality and Efficiency,” *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, March 15, 2018, <https://djilp.org/the-eu-turkey-statement-questions-on-legality-and-efficiency/>. For an article taking a somewhat opposite view see Daniel Thym, “Why the EU-Turkey Deal Can Be Legal and a Step in the Right Direction,” *EU Immigration and Asylum Law Blog*, March 11, 2016, <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/why-the-eu-turkey-deal-can-be-legal-and-a-step-in-the-right-direction/>.

<sup>46</sup> Maximilian Steinbeis, “Three legal requirements for the EU-Turkey deal: An interview with James Hathaway,” March 9, 2016, <https://verfassungsblog.de/three-legal-requirements-for-the-eu-turkey-deal-an-interview-with-james-hathaway/> and Nils Muiznieks, “Stop Your Backsliding, Europe,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/15/opinion/stop-your-backsliding-europe.html>

government officials who found the funds sorely inadequate. Additionally, the government complained about the slow disbursement of the funds and the EU's preference to allocate the funds to U.N. agencies and nongovernmental organizations, rather than directly transferring them to the government. Lastly, absence of progress, resulting from constant democratic backsliding, towards visa liberalization and the re-energizing of Turkey's accession process were raised by the Turkish government as a failure of the EU to keep its promise.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the statement was effective both in terms of improving the EU's border security concerns and sharing some of Turkey's burden in meeting the needs of the refugees. The number of illegal crossings across the Aegean Sea dropped dramatically, from about 855,000 in 2015, to just under 30,000 in 2017.<sup>47</sup> Funding made available to Turkey went into providing cash assistance to the refugees, as well as to enhanced educational facilities and capacity, access to healthcare, and opportunities for improving livelihoods through numerous language and vocational training programs. As of December 2020, all the 6 billion Euro funds under the two tranches of FRIT have been "committed and contracted and €4.1 billion disbursed."<sup>48</sup> Implementation of the projects is monitored closely by the EU and the UN's 3RP-Turkey reports.<sup>49</sup>

What did the parties get out of this arrangement?

With respect to migration management, Turkey had long been engaged by the EU, initially as an accession country and more recently as a third country.<sup>50</sup> This engagement was primarily driven by the EU's practice of externalizing its migration policies. This traditionally met with considerable resistance from the Turkish side.<sup>51</sup> Yet, with the statement, as one prominent professor of international refugee law argued, the EU quite successfully acquired for itself an "asylum space."<sup>52</sup> As of the end of 2020, Turkey hosts over 3.6 million refugees (with an additional more than 320,000 non-Syrian refugees and asylum seekers asylum applications) compared to the 2.9 million in all of Europe.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Turkey became a "good fence" and hence a "good neighbor," though not a foolproof one, in ensuring a solid and "steady reduction in flows" of irregular migrants towards Greece.<sup>54</sup>

Another related and very significant achievement of the statement from the perspective

<sup>47</sup> Figures obtained from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>. Subsequently, irregular crossings picked up reaching almost 60,000 in 2019 before dropping in 2020 to less than 6,000 due to the COVID pandemic.

<sup>48</sup> "EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey List of projects committed/decided, contracted, disbursed," March 15, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility\\_table.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility_table.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> "Fourth Annual Report on the Facility for Refugees in Turkey," European Commission, Brussels, April 30, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/fourth\\_annual\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_facility\\_for\\_refugees\\_in\\_turkey.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/fourth_annual_report_on_the_facility_for_refugees_in_turkey.pdf) and 2019 "Monitoring Report 3RP Turkey Chapter," (3RP, September 2020), <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/2019-monitoring-report-3rp-turkey-chapter-2019>.

<sup>50</sup> Ayşen Üstübiçi, "The impact of externalized migration governance on Turkey: technocratic migration governance and the production of differentiated legal status," *Comparative Migration Studies* Vol. 7, Issue 1, (December 2019) and Beken Saatçioğlu, "The European Union's refugee crisis and rising functionalism in EU-Turkey relations," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (2020).

<sup>51</sup> Ahmet İçduygu and Ayşen Üstübiçi (2014) "Negotiating Mobility, Debating Borders: Migration Diplomacy in Turkey-EU Relations," in Helen Schwenken and Sabine Ruß-Sattar (eds), *New Border and Citizenship Politics*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and Sibel Karadağ, "Extraterritoriality of European borders to Turkey: an implementation perspective of counteractive strategies," *Comparative Migration Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 1, (2019).

<sup>52</sup> James Hathaway, "The Global Cop-Out on Refugees," *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, (December 2018), p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> UNHCR Turkey Operational Update January 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR-Turkey-Operational-Update-January-2021.pdf> and "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019," p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Maribel Casas-Cortes, Sebastian Cobarrubias and John Pickles "'Good neighbours make good fences': Seahorse operations, border externalization and extra-territoriality," *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2016) and Dimitriadi, "Refugees at the gate of Europe".

"Yet, with the statement [...] the EU quite successfully acquired for itself an "asylum space." As of the end of 2020, Turkey hosts over 3.6 million refugees (with an additional more than 320,000 non-Syrian refugees and asylum seekers asylum applications) compared to the 2.9 million in all of Europe."

*“Another related and very significant achievement of the statement from the perspective of the EU, little discussed or acknowledged, is that Syrian refugees since 2016 have become to a large extent settled, if not integrated, into Turkish society.”*

*“The one substantive benefit flowing from the statement[...] is FRIT. FRIT, with other EU contributions, has provided close to 80 percent of the international funding for a multitude of projects to support refugees and their host communities.”*

of the EU, little discussed or acknowledged, is that Syrian refugees since 2016 have become to a large extent settled, if not integrated, into Turkish society. This is recognized by the government too.<sup>55</sup> The fact that only a few of them attempted to benefit from the “opening of the border” in February 2020 speaks for itself. The Syrians Barometer 2019, a survey of Turkish and Syrian respondents, supported by the UNHCR, shows that almost 89 percent of Syrians feel that they are “completely/almost completely” and “partially” integrated with their host communities.<sup>56</sup>

With respect to the Turkish side, a lot has been said and written about how the *quid pro quo* embedded in the statement has equipped Turkey with a “strong hand” and “leverage” over the EU.<sup>57</sup> However, the record is a mixed one. The conspicuous reality is that the Turkish side failed to achieve its most important goals: revitalizing the accession process, realization of the modernization of the customs union and visa liberalization, not to mention getting the EU to support a safe zone in northern Syria. However, Erdoğan did skillfully employ this newfound leverage with respect to getting the EU to tone down its criticism on Turkey’s democratic backsliding and de-Europeanization.<sup>58</sup> The limited attention and the mild language on democracy and human rights that the European Council statement of March 2021 has opted for is very revealing of this leverage. Previously, the EU had found itself deterred from imposing sanctions for Turkey’s policies in the Eastern Mediterranean and then adopting limited ones only at the end of 2020.<sup>59</sup> Internally, the arrangement did give an opportunity for Erdoğan to sell the statement to the public as a “reputational boost” and evidence of a changed strategic balance with the EU, demonstrating Turkey’s increased relative power.<sup>60</sup> However, this did not help diffuse the mounting public resentment against the government’s policies on refugees.

The one substantive benefit flowing from the statement, little acknowledged by Erdoğan and the upper echelons of his government but frequently mentioned by officials from public agencies and municipalities as well as by civil society representatives, is FRIT. FRIT, with other EU contributions, has provided close to 80 percent of the international funding for a multitude of projects to support refugees and their host communities.<sup>61</sup> Foremost among them are the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) that provide socio-economic support in the form cash assistance to the neediest households.<sup>62</sup> The ESSN and CCTE were designed in conjunction with the Turkish government. ESSN currently reaches out to 1.8 million beneficiaries. The program is recognized as the single largest humanitarian program in

<sup>55</sup> “Exit Strategy From The ESSN Program,” (Frit Office of the Presidency of Turkey and Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, December 2018), p. 4, <https://www.ailevecalisma.gov.tr/media/3725/essn-exit-strategy-1.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2019: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrian in Turkey*, (Ankara: Orion Kitapevi, 2020), p. 165.

<sup>57</sup> Günter Seufert, “Refugee Crisis: For Rationality in Relations with Turkey,” *SWP Comments*, March 11, 2016, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/point-of-view/refugee-crisis-for-rationality-in-relations-with-turkey/> and Asli Okyay and Jonathan Zaragoza-Cristiani, “The Leverage of the Gatekeeper: Power and Interdependence in the Migration Nexus between the EU and Turkey,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 51, No. 4, (2016).

<sup>58</sup> Dagı, “The EU–Turkey Migration Deal: Performance and Prospects,” p. 211.

<sup>59</sup> Jorgo Valero, “EU postpones announcement on Turkey sanctions to ‘de-escalate’ tensions,” *EurActiv*, July 15, 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-postpones-announcement-on-turkey-sanctions-to-de-escalate-tensions/> and “EU leaders back sanctions on Turkey over gas drilling,” *DW*, December 11, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-leaders-back-sanctions-on-turkey-over-gas-drilling/a-55900747>

<sup>60</sup> Dagı, “The EU–Turkey Migration Deal: Performance and Prospects,” p. 210.

<sup>61</sup> “Turkey 2020,” Financial Tracking Services, OCHA, <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/229/summary/2020>

<sup>62</sup> “The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN): Offering a lifeline to vulnerable refugees in Turkey,” European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn_en) and “Helping refugee children in Turkey go to school: Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE),” European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/field-blogs/videos/conditional-cash-transfer-education-ccte-programme-refugee-children-turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/field-blogs/videos/conditional-cash-transfer-education-ccte-programme-refugee-children-turkey_en)

*“[FRIT] offers a win-win outcome for all, without which all, but especially refugees, would be in a much more vulnerable state than they are today.”*

the world and is evaluated to have earned “good performance marks”.<sup>63</sup> CTE provides cash assistance to families whose children attend classes regularly and is achieving positive results considering that more than half of the Syrian refugee population is children.<sup>64</sup> FRIT funds have also helped support government agencies with their provision of education, health and social assistance services to the refugees.<sup>65</sup>

As much as the financial resources supporting FRIT may be dwarfed by the Turkish government’s expenditures, it still constitutes the most successful aspect of the EU-Turkey statement that offers a win-win outcome for all, without which all, but especially refugees, would be in a much more vulnerable state than they are today. However, the current situation, the focus of the next section, is very different than what it was in 2016 when the statement was signed.

### Section III: Current situation

*“According to the UNHCR, since 2014 Turkey has been hosting the largest number of refugees in the world. Beyond Syrian refugees, between 2011, when Syrians first began to arrive, and the end of 2020 Turkey received close to 560,000 asylum applications.”*

According to the UNHCR, since 2014 Turkey has been hosting the largest number of refugees in the world.<sup>66</sup> Beyond Syrian refugees, between 2011, when Syrians first began to arrive, and the end of 2020 Turkey received close to 560,000 asylum applications.<sup>67</sup> As of early 2021, the top three countries of origin were Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran with 173,000, 116,000 and 27,000 asylum seekers under protection respectively.<sup>68</sup> This picture is further complicated by the pool of irregular migrants whose size is by its very nature difficult to estimate. Based on the number of apprehended irregular migrants and interviews with government officials, one expert estimated, in February 2020, the number of irregular migrants in Turkey to be “no less than one million.”<sup>69</sup> He cautiously notes that the government may have been able to send back to their countries of origin only, at best, 20 percent of them.

As much as there may be good reasons for the resentment and blame Greece and the EU put on Ankara, managing this many refugees and asylum seekers, not to mention irregular migrants, naturally is not an easy task. The primary piece of legislation governing the management of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants is the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP).<sup>70</sup> It is no less than miraculous that the law was adopted in 2013 just as a mass influx of refugees was gathering. The law had been in the making since 2008 and was part of a UNHCR supported reform process going back to the mid-1990s and gathering pace with Turkey’s EU harmonization efforts. The law reformed, reorganized, and modernized Turkey’s otherwise archaic and disjointed migration management legislation.

<sup>63</sup> P. Facundo Cuevas et al, “Vulnerability and Protection of Refugees in Turkey,” (The World Bank and the World Food Programme, 2019), p. 3, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31813>

<sup>64</sup> Hannah Ring, Victoria Rothbard, David Seidenfeld, Francesca Stuer, and Kevin Kamto, “Programme Evaluation of the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CTE) for Syrians and Other Refugees in Turkey Final Evaluation Report,” (Washington DC: American Institutes for Research, September 2020), <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/UNICEF-Turkey-CTE-Evaluation-Report-September-2020.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> For a breakdown of international funds tracked by 3RP and accruing to Turkish public agencies see, “Support to Public Institutions by 3RP Partners and International Financial Institutions as of March 2021,” <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/support-public-institutions-3rp-partners-and-international-financial-institutions>

<sup>66</sup> “Mid-Year Trends 2020,” UNHCR, p 2, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5fc504d44/mid-year-trends-2020.html>

<sup>67</sup> Calculated from <https://en.goc.gov.tr/international-protection17>

<sup>68</sup> UNHCR Turkey Fact Sheet, February 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2021/03/Bi-Annual-Fact-Sheet-2021-02-Turkeyf.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> M. Murat Erdoğan, “Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler: 9 Yılın Kısa Muhasebesi,” *Perspektif*, February 28, 2020, <https://www.perspektif.online/turkiyedeki-suriyeliler-9-yilin-kisa-muhasebesi/>

<sup>70</sup> The English translation of the law can be reached from [https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/04/LoFIP\\_ENG\\_DGMM\\_revised-2017.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/04/LoFIP_ENG_DGMM_revised-2017.pdf). For a discussion of how this law relates to Syrian refugees see Meltem Ineli-Ciger, “Protecting Syrians in Turkey: A Legal Analysis,” *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol. 29, Issue 4, (December 2017).



*“As much as there may be good reasons for the resentment and blame Greece and the EU put on Ankara, managing this many refugees and asylum seekers, not to mention irregular migrants, naturally is not an easy task.”*

*“It is the view of the author of this report that without the funds provided by the EU and other international donors, the situation of Syrian refugees would have been much worse. This would also have been accompanied by greater tensions with the host community and a greater likelihood of them resorting to secondary movements.”*

However, the law retained the “geographical limitation” mentioned in Article 1 of the 1951 Geneva Convention granting “full” refugee status only to asylum seekers who flee “events occurring in Europe.”<sup>71</sup> Other asylum seekers whose applications are accepted are granted “conditional refugee” status giving them the right to remain in Turkey only until their resettlement into a third country can be arranged. The law also created a brand-new agency to implement the terms of this new law, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). Without the law and DGMM today the management of the refugee situation, not to mention the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

The government was quick to adopt an “open door” policy for Syrian refugees in 2011 and its policy evolved in a piecemeal fashion as their numbers increased and their prospects of return diminished. Based on the LFIP, in October 2014 the government formally extended “temporary protection” to the refugees, granting formal protection as well as access to basic public services on the condition that they are registered.<sup>72</sup> This was also a time when the practice of hosting refugees in more and more camps reached its limits and refugees increasingly found themselves initially in urban centers along the Syrian border, then practically in all corners of Turkey. This brought new challenges in terms of access to housing, as well as livelihood and education for the children. Just as the European migration crisis was unfolding, calls for the need to recognize that refugees would be here for the long term and that the focus should be increasingly on their integration into Turkish society, were emerging.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond ESSN/CCTE, discussed earlier, FRIT in parallel with the UN’s 3RP framework, initially supported protection, and basic needs-oriented assistance. However, in due course these programs expanded more and more into education, health, access to livelihood and social cohesion, as well as support for municipal services. The programs are shaped by strategic objectives negotiated between the Turkish government, the European Commission and UN agencies and laid out in the EU’s Updated Strategic Concept Note and 3RP for 2021-2022.<sup>74</sup> Both FRIT and 3RP have digital platforms from where it is possible to access information on projects across Turkey funded through these two programs.<sup>75</sup>

These programs are critical to supporting the refugees and are an important manifestation of burden-sharing with Turkey that has benefitted refugees. It is the view of the author of this report that without the funds provided by the EU and other international donors, the situation of Syrian refugees would have been much worse. This would also have been accompanied by greater tensions with the host community and a greater likelihood of them resorting to secondary movements. However, what is more pertinent in terms of the future is that the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey has become protracted and adjustments need to be made to the framework of support that

<sup>71</sup> “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>

<sup>72</sup> “Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği,” *Resmî Gazete*, No. 29153, October 22, 2014. The description of the terms of the temporary protection regulation in English can be seen at “Temporary Protection Regime - Turkey” Asylum Information Database and European Council of Refugees and Exiles, <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/content-temporary-protection> and “General Principles of Temporary Protection,” Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/general-principles-of-temporary-protection>.

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişçi, “What Turkey’s open-door policy means for Syrian refugees,” Brookings Institution, July 8, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> “Facility for Refugees in Turkey Updated Strategic Concept Note,” [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/updated\\_facility\\_strategic\\_concept\\_note.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/updated_facility_strategic_concept_note.pdf) and “Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter - 2021/2022,” (3RP, February, 2021), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85061>.

<sup>75</sup> “The Facility for Refugees in Turkey - Interactive projects map,” [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/migration\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/migration_en) and “Turkey Information Hub,” <http://www.refugeeinfoturkey.org/>. UNHCR too has digital platform offering detailed information on projects funded by both programs, <http://www.refugeeinfoturkey.org/goodpractices.html>

Turkey receives.

*“The UNHCR has projected that there will be 423,600 places of resettlement needed for Turkey in 2021. As of the end of November 2020 the UNHCR reported there were only 3,867 departures from Turkey out of 6,000 submissions. This number is even lower than the 10,286 resettlement departures the previous November in 2019.”*

The prospects of return for Syrian refugees remain dim in the short, medium, and long term, given the destruction and ongoing instability in their home country, as well as the unlikely resolution of what has become a “frozen conflict.”<sup>76</sup> According to the Syrians Barometer 2019 the response, among Syrians in Turkey, to the statement “I don’t plan to return to Syria under any circumstances” has shot up from just under 17 percent in 2017 to 52 percent in 2019, while those who supported the statement “I would return if the war in Syria ends and if an administration we want is formed” dropped by half from almost 60 to 30.3 percent during the same period.<sup>77</sup> The issue of repatriation to Syria and the relevant data is opaque. Repatriation has occurred to three pockets in northern Syria controlled by the Turkish military and its local allies. According to the Turkish Ministry of Defense, as of the end of 2019 more than half a million Syrians have gone back to these three areas.<sup>78</sup> The Ministry of Interior puts the figure at close to 420,000 as of early December 2020, whereas the UNHCR puts this number at just over 101,000 for the end of 2020.<sup>79</sup>

Global resettlement prospects in general are equally unpromising because of the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant political climate in most traditional resettlement countries, such as the United States and leading European Union member countries. Only minute numbers of resettlements are occurring from Turkey compared to the size of the numbers of forced migrants in need of resettlement. The UNHCR has projected that there will be 423,600 places of resettlement needed for Turkey in 2021.<sup>80</sup> As of the end of November 2020 the UNHCR reported there were only 3,867 departures from Turkey out of 6,000 submissions.<sup>81</sup> This number is even lower than the 10,286 resettlement departures the previous November in 2019.<sup>82</sup> The statement had referred to the prospect of 72,000 refugees being resettled from Turkey of which, as of March 2020, only 27,000 had been realized,<sup>83</sup> “a figure comparable to the number of Syrian refugees that nearly any given district in Istanbul hosts.”<sup>84</sup>

Local integration in the form of granting Syrian refugees a path for eventual citizenship in Turkey has not happened either. The granting of citizenship to the refugees is a very sensitive, politicized, and procedurally difficult issue.<sup>85</sup> Obtaining statistics on the topic is notoriously difficult. The only publicly available figure stands at 110,000 and dates from

<sup>76</sup> “Syria’s Frozen Conflict,” Hold Your Fire (podcast), International Crisis Group, January 28, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/syrias-frozen-conflict>

<sup>77</sup> Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2019*; pp. 176-7.

<sup>78</sup> “Bakanlığın Faaliyetleri ve Gündemdeki Konulara İlişkin Basın Bilgilendirme Toplantısı Düzenlendi,” Ministry of Defense Press Conference (podcast), <https://www.msb.gov.tr/SlaytHaber/27122019-04384>. According to this source 380,000, 135,000, and over 65,000 Syrians returned to the Euphrates Shield, Peace Spring Shield and the Olive Branch operation zones respectively (figures cited at 4:59; 5:45 and 10:11 minutes into the podcast.)

<sup>79</sup> Cited in “Türkiyedeki Suriyeli Sayısı Şubat 2021,” *Haber Bülteni*, Mülteciler Derneği, February 24, 2021, <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/> and Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions, [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria\\_durable\\_solutions](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions)

<sup>80</sup> “UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021,” UNHCR, p. 74, <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5ef34bfb7/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2021.html>

<sup>81</sup> UNHCR – Turkey, Operational Update November 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/12/UNHCR-Turkey-Operational-Update-November-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> UNHCR – Turkey, Operational Update November 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/01/UNHCR-Turkey-Operational-Update-November-2019.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> “EU-Turkey Statement Four years on,” March 2020, p. 2, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200318\\_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200318_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on_en.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> Beatriz Godoy Rivas and Laura Batalla Adam, “A Fresh Start on Migration? The New Pact and Its Implications for EU-Turkey Cooperation,” *Policy Note*, Istanbul Political Research Institute, [https://d4b693e1-c592-4336-bc6a-36c134d6fb5e.filesusr.com/ugd/c80586\\_9a8a9adb0e7d4fc6bcc3cb3b80c28708.pdf](https://d4b693e1-c592-4336-bc6a-36c134d6fb5e.filesusr.com/ugd/c80586_9a8a9adb0e7d4fc6bcc3cb3b80c28708.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Şebnem K. Akçapar and Doğu Şimşek, “The politics of Syrian refugees in Turkey: A question of inclusion and exclusion through citizenship,” *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 6, No 1, (2018).

*“This is not surprising considering that 87 percent of the Turkish public believe Syrians ‘should not be given any political rights’ and 76.5 percent are against the granting of citizenship, with very strong majorities from supporters of Erdoğan’s governing coalition.”*

the end of 2019.<sup>86</sup> Erdoğan had advocated the idea several times but had to retract it in the face of strong push back from the opposition and his own party in favor of Syrians’ return. This is not surprising considering that 87 percent of the Turkish public believe Syrians “should not be given any political rights” and 76.5 percent are against the granting of citizenship, with very strong majorities from supporters of Erdoğan’s governing coalition.<sup>87</sup>

In the absence of durable solutions, Syrian refugees are by default becoming increasingly self-integrated. The process is multifaceted, complex, and mostly driven through the acquisition of Turkish language skills, interaction with local community members, sending their children to Turkish schools, inter-marriages, and employment. The latter is especially critical. Employment and the possibility of becoming self-reliant is recognized as the most important driver of integration.<sup>88</sup> This is also the case with Syrian refugees in Turkey and is highlighted by FRIT’s updated strategic concept note that calls for programs “with a focus on providing sustainable socio-economic support and livelihood opportunities within Turkey.” This is a diplomatic and discreet way of saying employment, given sensitivities in Turkey.

In the meantime, a very large proportion of the approximately one million Syrian refugees of working age (almost 92 percent), as estimated by the ILO, are employed in the informal sector.<sup>89</sup> This picture not only leaves Syrians in very precarious work and social conditions, but also exacerbates public resentment driven by falling wages and rising unemployment among unskilled local labor. A survey conducted late in 2017 found that more than 71 percent of respondents believed that Syrians were taking jobs away from people in Turkey.<sup>90</sup> According to the Syrians Barometer 2019 this figure was 65 percent.<sup>91</sup> This is despite numerous econometric studies that demonstrate the minimal adverse impact that Syrians’ entry into the Turkish labor market has had on employment and wages.<sup>92</sup> More general studies, including one by the IOM, show how the employment of migrants leads to little to no significant displacement of locals from the labor market.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, there have also been efforts to draw Syrians into the formal sector. In January 2016, the government introduced legislation opening the Turkish labor market to Syrian refugees and enabled them to apply for work permits. For a range of reasons success has been limited and the number of Syrians employed formally with work permits was reported to stand at a little over 132,000 at the end of 2019.<sup>94</sup> There have also been concerted efforts during recent years by the government and international community, as well as local stakeholders, to draw Syrians into the formal economy, such

<sup>86</sup> “Türkiyedeki Suriyeli Sayısı Şubat 2021”.

<sup>87</sup> Erdoğan, “‘Securitization from Society’ and ‘Social Acceptance’,” p. 89.

<sup>88</sup> Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 21, Issue 2, (June 2008).

<sup>89</sup> Luis Pinedo Caro, “Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market,” ILO Office, Turkey, February 2020, p. 12, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---ilo-ankara/documents/publication/wcms\\_738602.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---ilo-ankara/documents/publication/wcms_738602.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Uyan Semerci, “Attitudes towards Syrians in Turkey-2017,” German Marshall Fund Discussion on Turkish Perceptions of Syrian Refugees, Ankara, Turkey, March 12, 2018, <https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/03/12/turkish-perceptions-of-syrian-refugees-20180312.pdf>

<sup>91</sup> Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2019*; p. 82.

<sup>92</sup> Doruk Cengiz and Hasan Tekguc, “Is It Merely A Labor Supply Shock? Impacts of Syrian Migrants on Local Economies in Turkey,” *Working Paper*, February 2018, PERI, University Massachusetts Amherst, <https://www.peri.umass.edu/component/k2/item/1050-is-it-merely-a-labor-supply-shock-impacts-of-syrian-migrants-on-local-economies-in-turkey> and Norman Loayza, Gabriel Ulyssea and Tomoko Utsumi, “Informality and the Labor Market Effects of Mass Migration: Theory and Evidence from Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” February 2018, <https://events.barcelonagse.eu/live/files/2352-gabrielulysseaa61349.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> “Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning: A handbook for policy-makers and practitioners,” (The Global Migration Group (GMG), 2010), p. 96, <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/gmg2010.pdf>.

<sup>94</sup> “Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter - 2021/2022,” p. 88.

“A survey conducted late in 2017 found that more than 71 percent of respondents believed that Syrians were taking jobs away from people in Turkey. According to the Syrians Barometer 2019 this figure was 65 percent. This is despite numerous econometric studies that demonstrate the minimal adverse impact that Syrians’ entry into the Turkish labor market has had on employment and wages.”

as programs and projects focusing on improving life skills, the provision of language and vocational training for forced migrants with a view to enhancing their employability in the labor market. These have been accompanied by numerous projects to encourage self-employment and the creation of small businesses.

However, this focus on the supply and small business side of the employment equation has not generated significant sustainable employment for refugees. According to the most recent 3RP Monitoring Report, over 11,000 Syrian and host community members gained access to economic opportunities and jobs in 2019.<sup>95</sup> Though the Report highlights that “this is double the achievement of 2018,” it also recognizes that this is only “a small contribution to responding to the overall needs, considering that the estimated active Syrian population in need of livelihoods support is at least 487,000”.<sup>96</sup> Engaging the Turkish private sector to employ more Syrians in innovative ways has also been advocated as a method to close this large gap in achieving sustainable livelihood for refugees.<sup>97</sup> However, it is important to remember that “firms are not charities” and that it is unrealistic to expect them to act based on purely philanthropic motivations.<sup>98</sup> They will need to be economically incentivized to employ refugees and this will need to make commercial sense.

The Turkish economy is nowhere near what it was when Syrian refugees first began to arrive in Turkey in large numbers. According to the World Bank, Turkish GDP per capita dropped from its peak in 2013 at 12,614 to 9,126 USD in the latest available year, reflecting growing economic structural problems.<sup>99</sup> These problems, and especially persistent unemployment, have now been further aggravated by the COVID pandemic.<sup>100</sup> These developments, in addition to the pandemic, are impacting the lives of refugees in diverse and profound ways, including their access to income and their prospects of livelihood opportunities. According to a report by the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) 69 percent of refugees surveyed have lost their jobs during the pandemic.<sup>101</sup> Another report by 3RP notes many Syrian-run business closures as well as a significant loss of income and increase in household debt, accompanied by food insecurity.<sup>102</sup>

The pandemic is also setting back gains made against endemic negative coping strategies involving child labor, thanks to the FRIT-supported CTE program.<sup>103</sup> The pandemic is also fueling fears that after a long period of gains made in reducing poverty, growing sections of the Turkish population together with refugees, of which almost half were already living under the poverty line, will be slipping back into poverty.<sup>104</sup> Lastly, to these

<sup>95</sup> “Monitoring Report 3RP Turkey Chapter,” p. 49.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>97</sup> Bastien Revel, “Turkey’s Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey,” (Washington DC: Atlantic Council, July 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Turkey%E2%80%99s-Refugee-Resilience-Expanding-and-Improving-Solutions-for-the-Economic-Inclusion-of-Syrians-in-Turkey-Report.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Betts and Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*, p. 175.

<sup>99</sup> GDP per capita (current US\$) – Turkey, World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=TR>. For discussion of these structural problems see Akat and Gürsel (eds.) *Turkish Economy at the Crossroads: Facing the Challenges Ahead*.

<sup>100</sup> Şenay Akyıldız, “How has COVID-19 affected Turkey’s labor market?” Evaluation Note, (Ankara: TEPAV, September 2, 2020), <https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/10170>

<sup>101</sup> “Turkey - Impact of COVID-19 on Refugee Populations Benefitting From the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) – Assessment Report,” p. 8, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76274>.

<sup>102</sup> 3RP Turkey Consolidated 2020 Appeal Review, June 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/77350.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> Ring, Rothbard, Seidenfeld, Stuer, and Kamto “Programme Evaluation of the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) for Syrians and Other Refugees in Turkey Final Evaluation Report,” p. 54.

<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Spicer and Ali Kucukgocmen, “Fear and poverty in Turkey as pandemic hits Erdoğan’s base,” *Reuters*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-turkey-poverty-analys/fear-and-poverty-in-turkey-as-pandemic-hits-erdogan-s-base-idUSKBN2611B5> and Comprehensive Vulnerability Monitoring Exercise, Round 4, January 2020, Turkey, WFP, p. 16, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000112161/download/?ga=2.22156667.1119451145.1614280126-1240475520.1614280126>.



*“The Turkish economy is nowhere near what it was when Syrian refugees first began to arrive in Turkey in large numbers. Turkish GDP per capita dropped from its peak in 2013 at 12,614 to 9,126 USD in the latest available year, reflecting growing economic structural problems. These problems, and especially persistent unemployment, have now been further aggravated by the COVID pandemic.”*

economic challenges one also needs to add the fact that job opportunities for 640,000 Syrian children coming through the Turkish national education system need to be considered.<sup>105</sup>

The next section will discuss a two-pronged approach to addressing the challenges resulting from the current refugee situation in Turkey, to mitigate the prospects of secondary movements. The first leg of the approach is based on the premises that “integration is key to ensuring onward migration reduces” and that employment is one of the best avenues to ensure such an outcome.<sup>106</sup> The second leg will explore other “missing elements” from the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016 in the form of revamping resettlement but also supporting greater humanitarian assistance to north-western Syria where many displaced people live in make-shift camps.

## Section IV: A new model of cooperation

As the European Commission launched the proposal “New Pact on Migration and Asylum,” Vice President Margaritis Schinas likened the pact to a building with three floors, comprised of: an external dimension (“centered around strengthened partnerships with countries of origin and transit”), “robust management” of external borders, and “firm but fair internal rules.” On the ground floor, protecting Europe’s borders remained primarily centered around “more of the same” practice of externalizing the cost and responsibility of managing its external borders to third countries.<sup>107</sup> The proposal continues to tie policy issues such as development assistance, trade concessions, security, education, agriculture, and visa facilitation for third-country nationals to those countries’ willingness to cooperate on migration management.

Such an approach is unlikely to be adequate for improving the EU’s management of its external borders. There is a foundational basement missing in the proposal, which recognizes the reality that most of the world’s refugees are hosted in the developing world and find themselves in protracted situations in the absence of durable solutions. This reality calls for policies inspired by the GCR — in the spirit of burden- and responsibility-sharing but also self-interest — for transforming victims of forced displacement from being a burden on a host country to becoming agents or contributors to development.

The benefits of mainstreaming migration to development have long been advocated in academic and policy-oriented literature.<sup>108</sup> Migrants are recognized as a resource capable of contributing to the prosperity of their host communities if conducive social, cultural, political, and economic policies are adopted towards their inclusion. It is seen as an approach considered to be in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of

<sup>105</sup> Revel, “Turkey’s Refugee Resilience:”, p. 29.

<sup>106</sup> Dimitriadi, “Refugees at the gate of Europe”.

<sup>107</sup> Paula García Andrade, “EU cooperation on migration with partner countries within the New Pact: new instruments for a new paradigm?” *EU Immigration and Asylum Law Blog*, December 8, 2020, <http://eumigrationlawblog.eu/eu-cooperation-on-migration-with-partner-countries-within-the-new-pact-new-instruments-for-a-new-paradigm/>

<sup>108</sup> Hein de Haas, “Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, (2010); Catherine W. Wenden, “Migration and development,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2017 and Kathleen Newland, “Migration, Development, and Global Governance: From Crisis toward Consolidation,” (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019). On policy literature see “The Contributions of Migrants and Migration to Development - Strengthening the Linkages,” (IOM, 2017), <https://eea.iom.int/publications/contributions-migrants-and-migration-development-strengthening-linkages> and “Human Mobility, Shared Opportunities: A Review of the 2009 Human Development Report and the Way Ahead,” (UNDP, October 2020), <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/Human-Mobility-Shared-Opportunities-A-Review-of-the-2009-Human-Development-Report-and-the-Way-Ahead.html>.

“...research shows that proper employment prospects for refugees and a welcoming environment for their entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth in the host country. This research also demonstrates that the faster obstacles to formal employment are resolved, the faster refugees integrate as productive members of their host society.”

Agenda 2030 and the commitment “to leave no one behind.” Most of this literature, however, is focused more on regular economic migration and on the question of how to help the development of countries of origin and assist them in better connecting with traditional countries of immigration.

Yet, with the European migration crisis of 2015-2016, the notion of harnessing the potential contribution of refugees to the development of their host communities gathered more attention.<sup>109</sup> A growing body of research shows that proper employment prospects for refugees and a welcoming environment for their entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth in the host country.<sup>110</sup> This research also demonstrates that the faster obstacles to formal employment are resolved, the faster refugees integrate as productive members of their host society. Furthermore, this kind of positive integration enhances refugees’ likelihood of return to their country of origin and their ability to help with reconstruction.

However, so far, the Turkish case suggests that there is, nevertheless, a qualitative difference between how forced displacement connects to development compared to regular migration. Most importantly, in contrast to voluntary migration, the mass influx of forced migration occurs suddenly, in an unwarranted manner and in very large numbers. This raises quite different challenges compared to regular migration. One of these challenges is how to deal with the expectation that the situation will be temporary and that the victims of forced migration will eventually be able to return to their homes. This becomes complicated as the growing presence of refugees becomes intensely intertwined, in a complicated manner, with domestic politics, economics, and issues of identity, adversely impacting local public attitudes towards their presence in the country. Hence, it is not surprising that Turkish public attitudes towards migrants are among the most negative when compared to many other countries according to a poll conducted in 2019.<sup>111</sup>

This complicates the government’s ability to develop and implement a coherent integration-focused long-term strategy to guide policy. It finds itself in a dilemma, recognizing that such policies would undermine the notion that refugees are here temporarily and encourage them to remain. This dilemma in turn leads to policies that continue to look more like “pragmatic muddling through”<sup>112</sup> and fail to deal with a growing reality that an estimated 80 percent will stay in Turkey.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, the Turkish government has been edging towards a transition from a humanitarian assistance focus to a developmental one. Opening the Turkish labor market to refugees has already been mentioned. More importantly, in 2018 the government adopted the

<sup>109</sup> Maegan Hendow, “Bridging refugee protection and development: Policy Recommendations for Applying a Development-Displacement Nexus Approach,” (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, January 2019),

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/EN\\_Bridging\\_Refugee\\_Protection\\_and\\_Development\\_EN\\_WEB\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/EN_Bridging_Refugee_Protection_and_Development_EN_WEB_FINAL.pdf) and

“Development Approaches to Migration and Displacement 2016-2018,” (UNDP, October 2019),

<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/development-approaches-to-migration-and-displacement.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Dany Bahar and Meagan Dooley, “No Refugees and Migrants Left Behind” in Homi Kharas (ed.), *Leave No One Behind: Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019) and Michael Clemens, Cindy Huang, and Jimmy Graham, “The Economic and Fiscal Effects of Granting Refugees Formal Labor Market Access,” Working Paper 496, (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, October 2018), <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/economic-and-fiscal-effects-granting-refugees-formal-labor-market-access.pdf>.

<sup>111</sup> “World Refugee Day: Global attitudes towards refugees,” Ipsos, June 2019,

<https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2019-06/World-Refugee-Day-2019-Ipsos.pdf>

<sup>112</sup> Sophia Hoffmann and Sahizer Samuk, “Turkish Immigration Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis,” *SWP Working Paper*, March 2016, p. 9, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Working\\_paper\\_Hoffmann\\_Turkish\\_immigration\\_policy.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Working_paper_Hoffmann_Turkish_immigration_policy.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> Ramon Mahia, Rafael de Arce, Ahmet Ali Koç and Gülden Bölük, “The short and long-term impact of Syrian refugees on the Turkish economy: a simulation approach,” *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 678 and Erdoğan, “Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler: 9 Yılın Kısa Muhasebesi”.

*“...in 2018 the government adopted the “Exit Strategy from the ESSN” that recognizes that “the SuTP is more settled in Turkey,” and shows a willingness to “implement more development-oriented assistance programs rather than humanitarian assistance. [...] The strategic purpose of this “graduation” process is identified as “to increase the social cohesion of the SuTP by supporting their adaptation to the labour market” in Turkey.”*

“Exit Strategy from the ESSN” that recognizes that “the SuTP is more settled in Turkey,” and shows a willingness to “implement more development-oriented assistance programs rather than humanitarian assistance. For this reason, a graduation strategy is considered vital for enhancing the skills and competences of the SuTP and making them less dependent on the social assistance.” The strategic purpose of this “graduation” process is identified as “to increase the social cohesion of the SuTP by supporting their adaptation to the labour market” in Turkey.<sup>114</sup>

The 11<sup>th</sup> Development Plan of Turkey, covering the period up to 2023, calls for strengthening the institutional base for better integrating foreign nationals into the economy, the adoption of the pending National Migration Strategy document and more effective cooperation with the international community.<sup>115</sup> Time will tell if this strategy document will include the recommendations from the report of the Special Migration Commission emphasizing the importance of incorporating migrants, including refugees, into Turkey’s broader developmental plans.<sup>116</sup> In the meantime, public agencies in cooperation with a range of international and local stakeholders support programs to facilitate access to livelihoods, with a growing emphasis on vocational training, programs fostering entrepreneurship and tax subsidies, to create sustainable employment. These programs have been reported extensively as well as discussed in numerous public events and conferences.<sup>117</sup> However, as mentioned earlier, as much as they may have increased the “employability” of their beneficiaries, these programs have not, in fact, translated themselves into actual jobs and job creation in any significant manner.

One way of overcoming this dilemma is to create demand for refugee labor. As noted in the introduction of this report, the GCR suggests exploring “preferential trade arrangements ... especially for goods and sectors with high refugee participation” to spur employment both for refugees and locals to help social cohesion.<sup>118</sup> This policy suggestion is fully in line with the notion that trade liberalization through the reduction of tariffs, the expansion or even full elimination of quotas, and the resolution of regulatory obstacles, is a key driver of economic growth and employment.<sup>119</sup> Such economic growth would also help create demand for the skills and labor of refugees and compliment efforts focused on increasing their employability.

As much as the New Pact does not bring this up, the German Presidency progress report on key elements of a European Migration and Asylum policy does state that “action on promoting and advancing tailor-made partnerships with key third countries needs to be taken without further delay and with the aim to show tangible results.”<sup>120</sup> In the specific

<sup>114</sup> “Exit Strategy From The ESSN Program,” also emphasizes importance of employment “to increase the social cohesion of the SuTP,” p. 4 and p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> “On Birinci Kalkınma Planı (2019-2023),” (Ankara: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, July 2019), pp. 168-9, <https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/OnBirinciKalkinmaPlani.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> “On Birinci Kalkınma Planı (2019-2023), Dış Göç Politikası Özel İhtisas Komisyonu Raporu, Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2018,” pp. 69-70, <https://sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/DisGocPolitikası%C4%B1OzelİhtisasKomisyonuRaporu.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> For a sample see “Working Towards Self-Reliance: Syrian refugees’ economic participation in Turkey,” Durable Solutions Platform and IGAM Research Center on Asylum and Migration, March 2019, [http://dsp-syria.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/Working%20towards%20Self-Reliance\\_English.pdf](http://dsp-syria.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/Working%20towards%20Self-Reliance_English.pdf); “Economic Inclusion and Livelihood Development of Young Refugees in the MENA,” 12-13 September 2019, Istanbul, Turkey, <https://www.isdb.org/news/prospects-a-conference-on-economic-inclusion-and-livelihood-development-of-young-refugees-in-the-mena-region>; “Geçici Koruma Altındaki Suriyeliler ve Türk Vatandaşları İçin İstihdam Desteği Projesi Açılış Toplantısı Ankara’da Yapıldı,” Turkish Employment Agency employment project launch event January 28, 2019, <https://www.iskur.gov.tr/haberler/gecici-koruma-altindaki-suriyeliler-ve-turk-vatandaslari-icin-istihdam-destegi-projesi-acilis-toplantisi-ankara-da-yapildi/> and “Employment and Skills Development Project - Component 1,” UNDP Turkey, <https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/projects/stihdam-ve-beceri-gelitirme-projesi.html>

<sup>118</sup> “Part II Global Compact on Refugees,” paragraphs 70-71.

<sup>119</sup> Jeffery A. Frankel and David Romer, “Does Trade Cause Growth?” *American Economic Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3, (1999) and R. Warziarg and K. H. Welch, “Trade Liberalization and Growth: New Evidence,” *NBER Working Paper* No. 10152, (2003), Cambridge, MA, NBER.

<sup>120</sup> “Presidency progress report on key elements of a European Migration and Asylum policy and the way forward,” p. 4, <https://www.eu2020.de/blob/2427378/79ff059a5f9cea1ed904aaf5cc15fa36/12-15-pm-viko-jha-fortschrittsbericht-en-data.pdf>.

*“...the GCR suggests exploring “preferential trade arrangements ... especially for goods and sectors with high refugee participation” to spur employment both for refugees and locals to help social cohesion.”*

*“...such a policy idea into action would be for the EU to grant concessions that would enable Turkey to expand its agricultural exports to the EU. Such concessions would be tied to the formal employment of Syrian refugees in a manner that meets ILO and EU labor standards.”*

case of Turkey, the European Commission had indeed flagged gaining access to “export markets... and providing preferential export and trading status to specific products” as a “priority action” for improving Syrian refugees’ self-reliance in Turkey.<sup>121</sup>

One specific way to put such a policy idea into action would be for the EU to grant concessions that would enable Turkey to expand its agricultural exports to the EU. Such concessions would be tied to the formal employment of Syrian refugees in a manner that meets ILO and EU labor standards. A certification and monitoring mechanism could be envisaged to ensure compliance with the implementation terms that would be agreed upon by both sides. Currently, exports of fresh fruits and vegetables, together with the agricultural portion of industrially processed agricultural goods, are excluded from the EU-Turkey customs union. Hence, they are taxed and face regulatory restrictions, such as quotas, leading to a loss of welfare.<sup>122</sup> Both the agricultural sector and industrial sector processing agricultural goods suffer from persistent labor supply shortages.<sup>123</sup> This shortage is often filled by Syrians and other migrants who are reported to have constituted “approximately 20 percent of 552,000 agricultural workers” in 2019.<sup>124</sup> The shortage, especially of seasonal agricultural workers, appears to have persisted during the pandemic, though under even more adverse and precarious conditions than usual.<sup>125</sup>

Another policy idea in support of trade facilitation could be to explore the establishment of a Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) near the Syrian border, where nearly a million and a half registered Syrian refugees live. The region (the provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, and Sanliurfa) is known for its diverse industrial and agricultural production. Kilis, only a few miles from the Syrian border, would be an ideal location. Such a zone would also have an added long-term advantage of spurring economic development and reconstruction across the border in Syria after the end of the conflict. Previous examples of such zones include the U.S.-backed QIZs put into place in 1996 in Jordan and Egypt to generate employment and support for the Arab-Israeli peace process.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, such a QIZ could also attract foreign direct investment interested in benefiting from concessional access to EU markets. In the spirit of burden-sharing underlined in the GCR, developed countries beyond the EU, such as Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea, could also be invited to support this QIZ, especially if the product range is expanded.

Ultimately, cooperation between the EU and Turkey to improve refugees’ self-reliance by enabling them to access decent, formal work in the agricultural sector is in the interest of all parties. For Turkey, implementing these policy recommendations would help refugees stand on their own feet, become productive members of Turkish society, diffuse public resentment, and reduce the likelihood of crime, while at the same time helping the economy grow. For the EU, this plan would reduce the likelihood of

<sup>121</sup> “Technical Assistance to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, Final Report,” (European Commission, October 2018), p. 12 and p. 85, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/updated\\_needs\\_assessment.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/updated_needs_assessment.pdf)

<sup>122</sup> From 2014 to 2018, agricultural exports to the EU fluctuated between 4 and 5 billion euros per year. Compared to Turkey’s overall exports to the EU, which amounted to roughly 70-80 billion euros per year during the same period, this is a particularly weak performance, calculated from “Agro-Food Trade Statistical Factsheet,” European Union – Turkey, March 15, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/trade-analysis/statistics/outside-eu/countries/agrifood-turkey\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/trade-analysis/statistics/outside-eu/countries/agrifood-turkey_en.pdf) and “Turkey-EU - international trade in goods statistics,” Eurostat, March 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Turkey-EU - international trade in goods statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Turkey-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics).

<sup>123</sup> “Turkey: Syrian Refugees and Resilience Plan 2018-19,” (FAO, 2018), p. 5 and p. 9, <http://www.fao.org/3/I9240EN/i9240en.pdf>.

<sup>124</sup> “Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter - 2021/2022,” p. 40.

<sup>125</sup> “Virus or Poverty: the Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Crop Production and Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Workers and Their Children in Turkey,” (Ankara: Development Workshop, 2020), <http://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/virus%20or%20poverty.pdf>. For a discussion of precarious employment conditions among Syrian agricultural workers in general see Sinem Kavak, “Syrian refugees in seasonal agricultural work: a case of adverse incorporation in Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 54 (2016).

<sup>126</sup> “Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) in Jordan and Egypt: Background and Issues for Congress”, Congressional Research Service, US Congress, August 2013, CRS Report R43202.



*“...cooperation between the EU and Turkey to improve refugees’ self-reliance by enabling them to access decent, formal work in the agricultural sector is in the interest of all parties.”*

secondary movements of refugees and the need to keep raising funds for humanitarian assistance as refugees become more independent. The latter is especially important, as sustaining the mobilization of funds to support FRIT is going to be a growing challenge, even if in July the European Parliament authorized an additional almost half a billion euros and the March 2021 European Council invited “the Commission to present a proposal to the Council for the continuation of financing for Syrian refugees in Turkey.”<sup>127</sup> What is more likely to happen is growing resistance from member states to contribute financially to FRIT, as predicted by a diplomat reflecting on the meeting that Erdoğan held with EU leaders to bring the border crisis to an end.<sup>128</sup>

This GCR-inspired approach, however, will need to be accompanied by a concerted effort to also focus on traditional “durable solutions”, constituting the second leg of the two-pronged approach. Resettlement of refugees has long been an established practice of burden-sharing. The COVID pandemic adversely affected resettlement that was globally at a low level in the first place. They will need to be revived. Indeed, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum advocates for “providing protection to those in need through resettlement” and includes support for resettlements in migration management partnerships with third countries.<sup>129</sup> The EU could also explore avenues to coordinate with the U.S. on resettlement programs. The new U.S. president Joe Biden has taken executive action to revive resettlement by boosting quota to 125,000 from the historically low 15,000 set by the Trump administration. Biden sees increasing these quotas in support of refugee protection as “central to a values-based foreign policy that demonstrates American moral leadership on the world stage”.<sup>130</sup>

The EU could be inspired by this perspective and develop a strong resettlement program which would surely benefit the EU’s image as a normative power but also help entice cooperation for mutually beneficial migration management partnership from third countries including Turkey. In Turkey’s case it is also refugees other than Syrians who need resettlement, especially Afghans whose “destination remains unknown.”<sup>131</sup> The destination problem is particularly acute for the many undocumented Afghans leading hidden lives in Turkey’s big cities, struggling to earn enough to support themselves and their families with constant threat of deportations.<sup>132</sup> The precarity of Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate the problem of Afghan refugees and irregular migrants.

In this regard the EU, in the spirit of introducing a “foundational level” to the New Pact, could also work with the new U.S administration to explore prospects of developing a “comprehensive plan of action” similar to the one in 1989 that resolved the protracted

<sup>127</sup> “Turkey: Extension of EU humanitarian programmes supporting 1.7 million refugees receives green light,” European Commission, July 10, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1324](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1324) and “Statement of the Members of the European Council,” p. 6, March 25, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf>.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in David M. Herszenhorn and Jacopo Barigazzi, “EU leaders meet Erdoğan to resolve fight over refugees,” *Politico*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/Erdoğan-meeting-brussels-eu-leaders-refugees-fight/>

<sup>129</sup> “Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on asylum and migration,” p. 7 and p. 14.

<sup>130</sup> “Fact Sheet: President Biden to Sign Executive Actions Restoring America’s Place in the World,” The White House, February 4, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/04/fact-sheet-president-biden-to-sign-executive-actions-restoring-americas-place-in-the-world/>

<sup>131</sup> Sema Buz, Fulya Memişoğlu, Hande Dönmez, and Simon Verduijn, “Destination Unknown: Afghans on the move in Turkey,” Mixed Migration Centre, Middle East Research Report, June 2020, <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/destination-unknown-afghans-on-the-move-in-turkey/>.

<sup>132</sup> Eric Reidy, “Fleeing worsening war, Afghans find narrowing options in Turkey,” *New Humanitarian*, September 28, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2018/09/24/fleeing-worsening-war-afghans-find-narrowing-options-turkey> and “The Return of Thousands of Afghans from Turkey back to Afghanistan is Cause for Alarm”, (Washington DC: Refugees International, May 7, 2018), <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/afghanrefugeesinturkey>

state of the “boat people” who had fled Vietnam after the end of the war.<sup>133</sup> Such a plan would focus on the resettlement of refugees from Syria’s neighboring countries and, as difficult as it might be, could be tied to a deal that calls for some local integration.<sup>134</sup> Such a global scheme should also be extended to Afghans. In the interim, a more modest arrangement like the Voluntary Humanitarian Admissions Scheme that had been envisaged in the EU-Turkey statement could be reached between the EU and Turkey to provide for the pool of Afghan refugees in Turkey with safe and legal alternatives to irregular migration. This could also help overcome the disillusionment on the Turkish side resulting from the EU’s failure to activate the Scheme for Syrian refugees.<sup>135</sup>

“Supporting a safe zone in northern Syria that Erdoğan has long sought from the EU is fraught with political challenges and is widely considered to be a controversial idea.”

Voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin is considered as the preferred durable solution that under ideal circumstances should occur in line with the UNHCR’s principles governing such returns.<sup>136</sup> However, in practice these “principles of voluntariness, safety and dignity” are not always easy to ensure.<sup>137</sup> The EU and Turkey could develop a dialogue to put into place a mechanism that ensures that these returns are indeed voluntary, in the sense that they do not violate the precept of “non-refoulement,” returnees do enjoy some assistance to rebuild their lives and that returns do not cause further internal displacements. However, ensuring their safety from military attacks will remain the greatest challenge.

Supporting a safe zone in northern Syria that Erdoğan has long sought from the EU is fraught with political challenges and is widely considered to be a controversial idea.<sup>138</sup> Actual Turkish presence in pockets of northern Syria, resulting from a series of military interventions since August 2016, raises question marks about Turkey’s commitment to the territorial integrity of Syria but is also accompanied by the risk of the “Gazafication” of such a zone that would be “perennially poverty-stricken and unstable.”<sup>139</sup> At the same time this presence has also provided a modicum of stability and protection for its inhabitants, averting additional mass displacements, so far.<sup>140</sup> The northwestern part of Syria’s Idlib region bordering Turkey remains vulnerable to such displacements. For the time being a precarious equilibrium appears to hold but is highly dependent on whether the Syrian regime and its allies decide to mount future military offensives to capture the area from the opposition.

There are 2.7 million displaced people living in this region and, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 1.6 million of them are leading precarious lives in 1,374 active IDP sites.<sup>141</sup> It was the prospect of a mass

<sup>133</sup> Alexander Casella, “Managing the “Boat People” Crisis: The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees,” Desperate Migration Series No. 2, International Peace Institute, 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/1610-Managing-the-Boat-People-Crisis.pdf>

<sup>134</sup> Dawn Chatty, “Commentary: When Hospitality turns into Hostility in Prolonged Forced Migration,” *International Migration*, Vol. 58, Issue 3, (2020).

<sup>135</sup> Godoy Rivas and Batalla Adam, “A Fresh Start on Migration?”

<sup>136</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Handbook - Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection*, January 1996, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3510.html>

<sup>137</sup> Jeff Crisp and Katy Long, “Safe and Voluntary Refugee Repatriation: From Principle to Practice,” *Journal of Migration and Human Security*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, (September 2016).

<sup>138</sup> Asli Aydintaşbaş, “A new Gaza: Turkey’s border policy in northern Syria”, *Policy Brief* (London: ECFR, May 2020), [https://ecfr.eu/publication/a\\_new\\_gaza\\_turkeys\\_border\\_policy\\_in\\_northern\\_syria/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/a_new_gaza_turkeys_border_policy_in_northern_syria/) and Sinem Adar, “Repatriation to Turkey’s “Safe Zone” in Northeast Syria: Ankara’s Goals and European Concerns,” *SWP Comment*, January 2020, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/repatriation-to-turkeys-safe-zone-in-northeast-syria/>.

<sup>139</sup> Aydintaşbaş, *Ibid.* On the area resembling Gaza see also Fabrice Balanche, “Idlib May Become the Next Gaza Strip,” *Policy Watch* No. 3288, March 26, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/idlib-may-become-next-gaza-strip>

<sup>140</sup> Carlotta Gall, “In Turkey’s Safe Zone in Syria, Security and Misery Go Hand in Hand,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/world/middleeast/syria-turkey-Erdoğan-afrin.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share> and

<sup>141</sup> “Recent Developments in Northwest Syria, Situation Report No. 25 - As of 26 February 2021,” OCHA, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nw\\_syria\\_sitrep25\\_20210226.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nw_syria_sitrep25_20210226.pdf)

“There are 2.7 million displaced people living in this region and, 1.6 million of them are leading precarious lives in 1,374 active IDP sites. It was the prospect of a mass influx of refugees into Turkey that was one of the important factors triggering the border crisis of February 2020. Enabling the flow of adequate humanitarian assistance into this fragile area will be critical to mitigating the risk of mass displacement into Turkey.”

influx of refugees into Turkey that was one of the important factors triggering the border crisis of February 2020. Enabling the flow of adequate humanitarian assistance into this fragile area will be critical to mitigating the risk of mass displacement into Turkey. Exploring the possibility of making EU funds available for such humanitarian assistance in cooperation with Turkey would help ease the dire conditions there but also strengthen the sense of protection against a potential military attack from regime forces that, in the words of a local council official, “would double the refugees in Europe” if it were to occur.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, incorporating funds for such assistance would not only be in line with the oft-overlooked Article 9 of the EU-Turkey statement that promised “to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria” in cooperation with Turkey<sup>143</sup>, but also help to meet the shortfall in funding for the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) that OCHA depends on for its humanitarian mission. The modalities would have to be arrived at in a manner that ensures that “the EU could (to a certain extent) stay away from legitimising” Turkish presence there.<sup>144</sup> All this effort would have to be dependent on the continued extension of UNSC Resolution 2533 permitting cross-border aid into northern Syria expiring in July 2021.

One other area in which cooperation between the EU and Turkey could be expanded is local government. Overwhelmingly, refugees, whether Syrian or from other backgrounds, live in urban settings. Municipalities have been at the forefront of managing the presence of Syrian and other refugees. They constitute the front line in managing migration and supporting the integration of forced migrants into their respective communities.<sup>145</sup> It is especially during the COVID pandemic that some of the municipalities with large refugee populations have distinguished themselves by extending their social assistance services to them too.<sup>146</sup> Beyond the pandemic, the role of municipalities in assisting the integration of refugees as central to the transition from humanitarian to developmental assistance is appropriately recognized at the “International Forum on Local Solutions to Migration and Displacement” that adopted the Gaziantep Declaration.<sup>147</sup> Their centrality is also amply recognized in the GCR, as well as acknowledged by the EU in its updated strategic concept note for FRIT.

However, municipalities do face many shortcomings and challenges. Reports from the Union of Municipalities in Turkey (2019), from the UNDP in Turkey (2018) and from the Marmara Municipalities Union (2017) document in considerable detail the challenges they face in performing their services.<sup>148</sup> It is not the purpose of this report to dwell on them but to suggest that one novel way, beyond the provision of funds, is to develop city-twinning partnerships. This has already been suggested with respect to forced displacement and COVID-19 but could be expanded to the exchange of experiences and knowhow across European cities and Turkish ones with respect to the many faces of

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in “In Turkey’s Safe Zone in Syria, Security and Misery Go Hand in Hand”.

<sup>143</sup> Nienke van Heukelingen, “A new momentum for EU-Turkey Policy Brief cooperation on migration,” *Clingendael Policy Brief*, February 2021, p. 6, [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Policy\\_brief\\_EUTurkey\\_cooperation\\_migration\\_February\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Policy_brief_EUTurkey_cooperation_migration_February_2021_0.pdf).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>145</sup> Rabia Karakaya Polat and Vivien Lowndes, “Why are Municipalities So Important for Syrian Refugees in Turkey?” *Panorama*, November 24, 2020, <https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2020/11/24/why-are-municipalities-so-important-for-syrian-refugees-in-turkey/>

<sup>146</sup> Güven Sak and Omar Kadkoy, “Alleviating COVID-19 Misery of the Forcibly Displaced: G20 Action,” *Evaluation Note*, (Ankara: TEPAV, December 2020), p. 5,

[https://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/mce/2020/notlar/alleviating\\_covid19\\_misery\\_of\\_the\\_forcibly\\_displaced\\_g20\\_action.pdf](https://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/mce/2020/notlar/alleviating_covid19_misery_of_the_forcibly_displaced_g20_action.pdf)

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.municipalforum2019.org/>

<sup>148</sup> Emre Dedeoglu, Sefa Pamuksuz and Emre Koyuncu, “Syrian Refugees and Municipalities in Turkey: A Financial Impact Analysis,” (Union of Municipalities of Turkey, March 2019); Strengthening Municipal Resilience in Response to the Impact of the Syria Crisis in Turkey, October 2018, [https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/library/syria\\_programme/tuerkiye-boelgesel-muelteciler-dayanilik-plan-3rp-kapsamnda-ka.html](https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/library/syria_programme/tuerkiye-boelgesel-muelteciler-dayanilik-plan-3rp-kapsamnda-ka.html) and “Urban Refugees from “Detachment” to “Harmonization” Syrian Refugees and Process Management of Municipalities: The Case of Istanbul,” Marmara Municipalities Union, January 2017, [https://mmuratErdoğan.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/mmu-urban-refugees-report-2017\\_en.pdf](https://mmuratErdoğan.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/mmu-urban-refugees-report-2017_en.pdf).

*“One other area in which cooperation between the EU and Turkey could be expanded is local government.”*

*“...translating these ideas into policy would require a big and uphill effort. There is an important role for Greece to play, especially if Greece, as a frontline country in migration management, would like[...] to play a role that is not limited to being just “Europe’s ‘shield’.” A role that has not been particularly benevolent for Greece’s image in terms of human and refugee rights.”*

managing the presence of migrants in urban environments.<sup>149</sup> This would also give civil society an opportunity to participate more actively than is currently the case. In the case of Greek and Turkish municipalities it would create forums of dialogue and channels of cooperation on meeting common challenges at a time when state to state relations are tense and difficult. Additionally, these forums might also provide an environment for testing some of the above recommendations and discussing ways of pursuing them.

The final but possibly trickiest area of cooperation concerns going beyond the current focus on border control that defines the managing of irregular migration. Crossings into Greece via the Aegean Sea are once again down compared to early last year.<sup>150</sup> Ironically, it is reports of pushbacks of migrants and refugees in the opposite direction that is now attracting growing attention and criticism.<sup>151</sup> Success in preventing movements of irregular migrants from Turkey into Greece and Bulgaria is transforming Turkey from a transit to a destination country. As their numbers increase and Turkey is unable to send them back to their countries of origin, the pressure to cross into the EU mounts. The EU-Turkey statement did not specifically address this issue and continued construction of removal centers can hardly help resolve the problem in the long run. Moving forward, expanding current limited cooperation between Turkey and the EU in assisting migrants with voluntary and safe returns to their country of origin would be an effective step towards relieving pressure on Turkey.<sup>152</sup> It would also contribute to a more constructive migration management that goes beyond the EU-Turkey statement.

## Conclusion

Many may rightly think that these policy suggestions are of a tall order and even unrealistic. Yet, apart from propping up resettlement, the other ideas were not covered in the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016 and could possibly be considered as the “missing elements” referred to by von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission. Naturally, translating these ideas into policy would require a big and uphill effort. There is an important role for Greece to play, especially if Greece, as a frontline country in migration management, would like, in the words of a migration expert, to play a role that is not limited to being just “Europe’s ‘shield’.” A role that has not been particularly benevolent for Greece’s image in terms of human and refugee rights.

Greece, as a member of the European Union and a country with an important stake in the EU’s migration policy, could pursue these ideas through the policy making channels of the EU. This would be very much in line with the Greek Prime Minister’s wish to achieve a “win-win situation.” However, to get there a process of discussing and distilling these ideas for policy makers would be needed. The Greek think-tank world, and especially ELIAMEP, would be ideally placed to offer and lead forums for intra-EU discussions but also across the Aegean Sea, reminiscent of the TII efforts it led in late 1990s and early 2000s.

Among the policy suggestions the one that would be most impactful in terms of arriving

<sup>149</sup> “Alleviating COVID-19 Misery of the Forcibly Displaced:”, p. 9.

<sup>150</sup> “Aegean Islands Weekly Snapshot 15 - 21 February 2021,” UNHCR Greece, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85060>

<sup>151</sup> Anthee Carassava, “UNHCR, EU Slam Greece Over Migrant Pushbacks, Abuse,” VOA, November 21, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/unhcr-eu-slam-greece-over-migrant-pushbacks-abuse> and “EU official urges Greece to investigate reports of asylum-seeker pushbacks,” Reuters, March 29, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-lesbos/eu-official-urges-greece-to-investigate-asylum-seeker-pushbacks-idUSKBN2BL231?edition-redirect=in>

<sup>152</sup> For an ongoing project in this area see “The European Union assists 3500 migrants in returning home voluntarily in partnership with IOM and DGMM,” April 16, 2019, Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/pr/european-union-assists-3500-migrants-returning-home-voluntarily-partnership-iom-and-dgmm-9435>



*“Among the policy suggestions the one that would be most impactful in terms of arriving at a “win-win situation” that best benefits the refugees and the host communities into which they are becoming integrated, would be seeing through the implementation of the “trade facilitation” idea borrowed from the GCR.”*

*“Considering that the Syrian displacement is entering its tenth year with no prospects of the conflict in Syria being resolved, such a package deal would be more than timely.”*

at a “win-win situation” that best benefits the refugees and the host communities into which they are becoming integrated, would be seeing through the implementation of the “trade facilitation” idea borrowed from the GCR. However, for this to happen it will be important not to see this idea as a thinly disguised way of circumventing the standstill over the modernization of the EU-Turkey customs union. The idea may also risk being resisted by government circles in Turkey as a sign of a weakening commitment to updating the customs union and prospects of revitalizing the accession process. Instead, “trade facilitation” should be considered as an “out of the box” idea that deserves exploring in the spirit of co-managing an exceptionally challenging refugee reality in Turkey that, after all, also reflects the broader global refugee situation. Hence, exploring and eventually finding a way of implementing this idea in a manner that ensures the protection of refugee rights could constitute a reference for addressing the broader global refugee picture too. It would also help add to the policy toolbox of the “New Pact”, an idea that can soften some of the criticisms directed at the externalization logic characterizing the “ground level” of the Pact.

While “trade facilitation” would be a great tool helping the “inclusion and ultimately settlement of Syrians in Turkey”<sup>153</sup> to avert crises like the ones from 2015-16 and early in 2020, it is important to recognize that the Turkish government will worry about the public’s reaction. It will be important to articulate well the benefits of mainstreaming the presence of refugees in Turkey into development. The economic gains to the host community as well as the benefits to social cohesion resulting from inclusion, compared to the problems that would emerge from persistent exclusion of refugees, will need an effective communication strategy. This is where the other policy suggestions, ranging from revamped resettlement to exploring avenues of safe return for those interested, as well as funding for humanitarian assistance for the IDPs amassed on the Turkish border, become important. Incorporating these policies into a package deal would help resolve the dilemma of relative gains when seeking a “win-win” outcome, and it could help the government in developing a constructive and positive narrative.

Considering that the Syrian displacement is entering its tenth year with no prospects of the conflict in Syria being resolved, such a package deal would be more than timely. Indeed, if this package could be arrived at through genuine cooperation for the benefit of refugees, it would also crown the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Most importantly, such a deal could also be an important step to help convert last year into an *annus mirabilis*.

<sup>153</sup> Dimitriadi, “Refugees at the gate of Europe”.