

# PRESENT AND FUTURE MIGRATION FLOWS INTO EUROPE

THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ARE ALL-TIME READY TO CROSS THE BORDER INTO EUROPE, AND OVER A MILLION FORCED DISPLACED PEOPLE FROM IDLIB ARE WAITING AT THE TURKISH-SYRIAN BORDER



A SYRIAN WOMAN WHO WAS HELPING GREEK REFUGEES DURING WWII - THIS IS AMONG THE MOST SHARED PICTURES ON SOCIAL MEDIA, BOTH BY REFUGEES AND TURKISH PEOPLE. - © HUNE EL KUDÜS 1942

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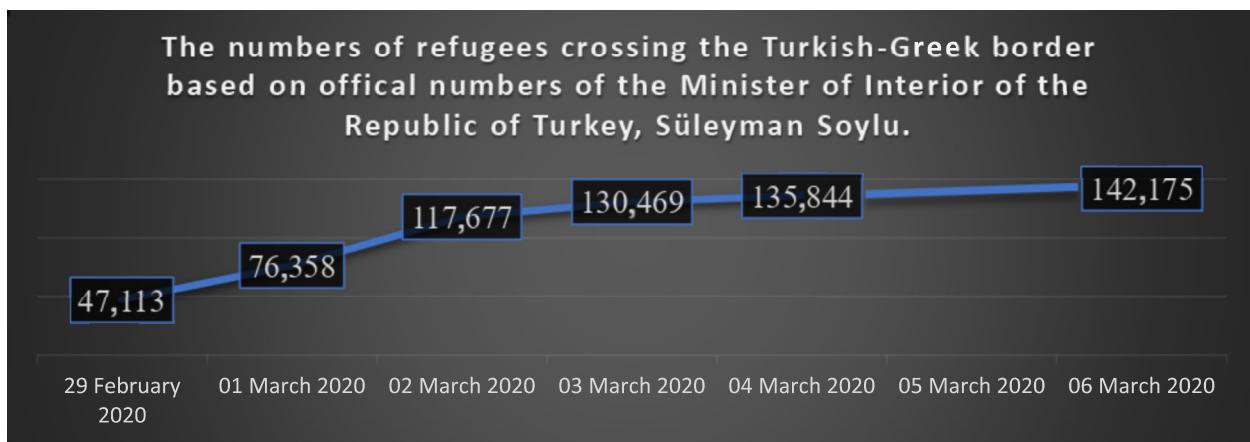
## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migration has been a reality for Turkey since 2011. Turkey is the world's largest host country of registered refugees, with over 3.6 million Syrian refugees. After Turkey opened its border to Greece on 28 February 2020, the government claims that more than 142,000 refugees have arrived at the Turkish-Greek border to enter Europe. In Syria, around 1.5 million people from Idlib are waiting at the Turkish-Syrian border to enter Turkey. Turkey had previously warned about a new refugee influx from Idlib. Currently, as the refugees arrive at the Turkish-Syrian border, Turkey is signalling that it is no longer willing to carry the burden alone. Turkey believes that the European Union has not kept its promises. The European Union argues that the rules and regulations of the funds have caused delays in payments. Therefore, neither side is happy with the situation. Turkey aims to establish a safe zone in Idlib and resettle refugees in Idlib. Failing this, it will help the refugees reach other countries to prevent a new influx in Turkey. It is asking for a fair share basis regarding the resettlement of refugees, which may be a new situation for Europe over the coming years. The refugees in Turkey are not happy with their working conditions, and they want to move to Europe for the sake of their children and their future. Even if the refugees with a residence permit in Turkey or Turkish citizenship are discounted, there is still a group among Syrians who can migrate. Some experts suggest that Afghans who are in Turkey without protected status are the ones who will potentially aim to migrate to Europe. The Migration Management office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Turkey has reported that there are 201,437 irregular Afghans in Turkey. However, the number might be higher than can be observed from the situation at the borders. The 142,000 people waiting at the Turkish-Greek border, this is not only a number –these are 142,000 human lives. Before this situation turns into a human tragedy, a solution is urgently required. Europe should consider the situation at the borders above politics. Neither the 30,000 people stated by Greece nor the number reported by Turkey matters. Even if there were only a few people at the border, the asylum process requires proper documentation and analysis, together with humanitarian assistance to refugees.

## II. METHOD

Refugees, journalists, locals, and migration experts provided their insights and analysis regarding the current migration flows to the borders. To understand the real situation at the borders, we used YouTube videos and Twitter posts available to the public published by journalists, refugees, and migration experts. Refugees, journalists, migration experts, NGO representatives, and researchers who are following Migport social media have shared their knowledge and experiences regarding this topic. This report covers events at the Turkish-Greek border from 29 February to 27 March 2020.

## III. INTRODUCTION



Source: Diagram prepared by Migport

After the situation in Idlib had deteriorated between the Turkish and Syrian armies, in which 33 Turkish soldiers lost their lives, the Turkish government announced that it would open its borders to Europe. This has encouraged refugees in Turkey to rush to the Turkish-Greek border.

The Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Turkey, Süleyman Soylu, tweeted that 142,175 refugees had crossed the Turkish-Greek border by the morning of 6 March 2020 (Soylu, Twitter Account of Süleyman Soylu). However, this official figure published by the Turkish government was confirmed neither by the Greek government nor by foreign journalists who were

on site. Some journalists who have visited the Turkish-Greek border have stated that they saw a massive number of refugees crowded together. Journalists have recorded the migrant situation at the border and shared it on social media channels. Most of the refugees at the Turkish-Greek border are Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians, Bangladeshis and Africans who do not have any international or temporary protection. Syrians who do not hold Turkish citizenship or a Turkish residence permit are also present at the borders. Refugees, activists, journalists and locals who follow the Migport Refugee Application have also shared their observations concerning the current situation at the borders. Migport, which is a digital migration management start-up and mobile application that connects refugees with locals and institutions, estimates that around 100,000 to 150,000 people are at the border, which confirms the numbers Turkey has presented. The refugees do not reside in a specific area; they are staying in places throughout the province of Edirne, which has its capital city of the same name at the Greek border. Some refugees have reported that after Edirne, they fled to Izmir, a city in the west of Turkey, to try to get to Europe across the Aegean Sea. Another controversy is how the refugees got there. Some refugees using the Migport platform have stated that Syrian business owners helped them arrive at the borders by sponsoring buses. However, some journalists have claimed that Turkish institutions sponsored the buses.

The diagram indicates an upward trend in the first week after the opening of the Turkish-Greek border. Before the Covid-19 outbreak in Europe, Turkish migration experts estimated that around 1 to 2 million refugees in Turkey would eventually arrive at the Turkish-Greek border. Refugees have reported that they see Turkey and Greece as transit countries. They intend to flee to Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, or the Nordic countries. They state, that they are not happy in Turkey with their working conditions, wages, and living costs. They want to migrate to a better country in Europe.

The tragic incidents when the Greek authorities fired tear gas and plastic bullets at refugees at the Turkish-Greek border scared off refugees. Migration experts estimated that there were only about 20,000 to 30,000 refugees at the Turkish-Greek border on 19 March 2020. On the same day, an NGO (that wishes to remain anonymous) stated that it had counted over 10,000 in one location. It also estimated that by 27 March 2020, the number had declined after the Covid-19 outbreak in Turkey. The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-

ASAM), the Turkish Red Crescent, and some other NGOs are providing ongoing humanitarian assistance to refugees at the Turkish-Greek border. Ongoing support at the border indicates that as of 27 March 2020, refugees have remained at the border for nearly one month. Moreover, the hygienic conditions at the borders are insufficient. Although mobile toilets have recently arrived, there are not enough. The refugees sleep on the ground or in tents made of wood, clothes and nylon. Some of them found shelter with their friends or families in Edirne City.

Speaking of support: Under the EU-Turkey Deal of 18 March 2016, Turkey received around €3.2 billion of the promised €6 billion as net payments (European Commission, 2020). Institutions in Turkey did not receive the remaining €2.8 billion. A lack of optimisation tools for management and knowledge in civil society, and the lack of access to the needs, skills, and preferences of refugees, has brought about ineffective migration management. The EU should integrate optimization knowledge and experience from the private sector to projects financed by the EU.

Finally, The Minister of the Interior, Süleyman Soylu, stated that they have evacuated refugees from Pazarkule, Turkish-Greek border in Edirne. They have placed refugees safely in quarantine in nine provinces following Covid-19 precautions. As of the 27 of March, he said that they had operated until the morning and had evacuated 5,800 refugees in terms of humanitarian actions and precautions. Mr. Soylu added that Turkey would not say no to refugees who want to go to Europe after the Coronavirus risk in Turkey is over (Soylu, Sözcü, 2020).

## IV. MIGPORT PLATFORM OBSERVATIONS

Migport is a knowledge-sharing platform for refugees. Its users explain that fake news spread rapidly in the refugees' social networks, resulting in misinformation. The users of this platform provide information and report on the events as eyewitnesses.

- Buses have transferred refugees from Ankara to the border.
- Hundreds of people from the Önder district (a district in Ankara with a high refugee density) have migrated to the border.
- Syrian business owners sponsored five buses from Istanbul to transfer refugees to the Turkish-Greek border.
- Buses stopped transporting refugees to the border from Istanbul later.
- In Istanbul, buses transported the refugees from Aksaray and Fatih districts.
- The buses charged Syrians 150 TL (Turkish Lira) to take them to the border in Edirne.
- There are free buses from multiple cities in Turkey.
- There were over 100,000 people.
- Syrian refugees at the border are around 20% of the total.
- They were staying in different areas in Edirne province.
- Refugees stated that after they had crossed the Turkish border around 25 km into Greece, the Greek police pushed them back into Turkey.
- Refugees are trying different roads to cross the border.
- After trying to cross the border unsuccessfully, some refugees turned back to their cities.
- Turkish authorities are providing food and water to the refugees daily.
- They believe that humanitarian organisations should help refugees to ask for asylum in Europe.

Furthermore, Migport interviewed Refugees as to why do they want to migrate to Europe. These were the most common statements:

- They see their and their children's future not in Turkey but in Europe.
- They feel that they have lost the time of their lives here.
- They think their living conditions will be better in Europe.
- They plan to finish their education in Europe and work there.

Balkan Group Media journalist Yusuf Emin, who was present at the border during the migration of refugees to the border, has informed Migport about the reasons why the refugees are dissatisfied in Turkey.

- They are unable to get work permits from their workplaces.
- Most refugees are working irregularly in Turkey.
- They cannot earn enough money for a living.
- They work under poor working conditions (e.g. overwork)

## V. RECENT HASHTAGS USED ON TWITTER

Some hashtags used in Turkey and Greece on Twitter from 29 February to 27 March 2020:

#Greece\_under\_attack

#europeunderattack

#Greece\_Turkey\_Borders

#benmülteciyim (English: I am refugee)

#sehitlerimizvar (English: We have martyrs)

#ÜlkemdeSuriyeliİstemiyorum (English: I do not want Syrian in my country)

#suriyeliistemiyoruz (English: We do not want Syrians)

## **VI. TURKISH-GREEK BORDER THROUGH YOUTUBE VIDEO OBSERVATIONS**

Cüneyt Özdemir, a Turkish journalist and YouTuber, said on his YouTube channel, that the Ministry of the Interior could have counted the number of refugees through checkpoints at the border. He also mentioned that plastic boats are now even available at the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. Afterwards, Özdemir also interviewed refugees at the border, who were mainly Afghans. They stated that they aim to go to Germany, as their working conditions in Turkey are poor and that living costs are not sustainable with their incomes. (Özdemir, 2020)

Esin Bozovalı, a human rights lawyer, participated in Gülçin Karabağ's programme in Medyascope, a YouTube channel. She stated that both regular and irregular Syrian, Afghani, Pakistani, Somalian, Cameroon, and Tajik refugees are present at the border. She talked with around 50 of them. They responded again that they are trying their chances to go to Europe for a better life. Esin also warned refugees that crossing the border is difficult, but they told her they will still wait. She stated that the Greek side fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the refugees. Hygiene was a problem based on Esin's insights; there is just one mobile toilet for everyone. She reported that people are sleeping on the ground. She also spoke to Syrians, who had returned to Istanbul from the border voluntarily after being injured. (Bozovalı, 2020).

On CNN Türk's Tarafsız Bölge television program, moderated by Turkish journalist Ahmet Hakan, Süleyman Soylu, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Turkey reported that 1.5 million people might move to Turkey from Idlib, Syria too. He stated that Turkey would not carry millions of refugees from Idlib alone. There have already been over 450,000 refugees without registration, mainly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and African countries. Relating to the EU-Turkey Deal, Turkey has sent around 103,000 people back to their countries voluntarily. Last, he adds that 25% of the refugees at the border are from Syria (Soylu, YouTube CNN Türk Tarafsız Bölge - Ahmet Hakan, 2020).

## VII. EU-TURKEY DEAL FROM NGOs PERSPECTIVE

The President of the Centre on Asylum and Migration (İGAM), Metin Çorabatır, stated that Turkey has no more capacity to carry more refugees within its borders. Turkey is currently hosting around 4 million refugees. As Turkey expects to see a new refugee influx from Idlib, it has changed its policy towards refugees. Metin Çorabatır believes that the reason for Turkey's decision to open the Turkish-Greek border was Operation Spring Shield in Idlib. He also explained that Turkey feels left alone with the enormous burden of hosting 4 million refugees. Unless there is peace in Idlib, refugees will continue to migrate toward Turkey. Turkey aims to prevent this by creating a safe zone in Idlib where refugees will get protection, which will require international cooperation. Turkey wants to build this safe zone with the collaboration of the European Union and with a division of responsibilities. If the refugees cannot stay within the safe zone, Turkey threatens to let them go to Europe. Turkey can no longer accept new refugees in addition to the existing ones.

IGAM's president, Metin Çorabatır, has also commented regarding the EU-Turkey Deal. Europe has paid €3,239,752,979 (European Commission, 2020) as net payments to Turkey under the agreement (from information on the website of the EU Delegation). EU Deal net transfer delays are due to some methodology reasons. Metin Çorabatır states that, first, tender specifications and processes and highly bureaucratic decision-making processes slow down the processes and hence payments. Second, rules and regulations regarding distributing the fund also create delays in the net payments. For instance, the European Union favours projects proposed by large institutions. These large organizations make contracts with the European Union, decide on a topic, and afterwards open the projects up for tenders, where small organizations can bid to carry out the operations. Therefore, the process results in a contract from the EU to large organizations, and subsequent subcontracts from the large organizations to smaller ones, and from them to the beneficiaries. The process extends the program length, and hence payments. All partners are affected when one actor fails and prolongs the project. Third, the organization completes auditing and final reports after the project has concluded. During this process, documents that the NGOs submit are not always complete, and the EU asks for more information. Therefore, completing the documents for audit and concluding the project also slows down the process for payments. Metin Çorabatır also added that some organizations could not complete plans on time, which created losses in payments. Unless the organizations meet the project requirements, they cannot receive money.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### i. CONCLUSION

Turkey and Europe connect historically and geographically. When European leaders do not include Turkey in migration policy decisions, there is an impact on European outcomes. Additionally, as Turkey works closely with Europe, not collaborating can also worsen migration flows towards Turkey. No country can control the migration of millions of people. However, they can assist them and protect both refugees and their citizens. States should consider migration flows regardless of politics. Turkey claims there are over 142,000 people at the Turkish-Greek border. According to international law and refugee convention regulations, even if there is one person at the border, countries should arrange help for refugees. If people have to leave their homeland forcibly and ask for shelter, countries are obliged to manage support under the same law and regulations. Regardless of the reason, they have fled – war or climate change, for example – refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants should have universal migration rights valid in all countries around the world. Each country should follow migration management guidelines so that there is no repeat of what has happened recently at the border. Current refugees in Turkey aim to migrate to Europe, and there is a new migration flow from Idlib to Turkey. European countries and Turkey should agree upon the new rules and regulations, a fair share, and a new code of conduct concerning migration management. Turkey and the European Union should find new solutions as soon as possible to avoid further humanitarian catastrophes and tragic occurrences.

## ii. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Urgent help to refugees at the borders regarding their needs, such as food, shelter, and health. Concerning health assistance, the European Union and Turkey should collaborate regarding actions towards protecting refugees from becoming infected with Coronavirus, Covid-19.
- The EU and Turkey should use proper documentation of refugees, which includes names, surnames, country of origin, and destination in case of digital solutions regarding asylum processes.
- Turkey and Europe should collaborate and plan for the possibility of 1.5 million people arriving from Idlib.
- Strict funding rules, financial capacity, operational capacity, and short project duration have led funding being suspended. The EU and Turkey should examine the situation independently with mediators.
- Before the European Union awards contracts, NGOs should improve migration management by understanding the skills, needs, and preferences of refugees. That is, funds and programs should address the current needs of refugees.
- Refugee funding should include optimization tools to speed up the process, solutions, decision-making, and operations regarding existing and new deals for refugees.
- Online work and freelance work could be revenue models for refugees.
- Turkey and Europe should re-establish relationships in terms of refugees in Turkey.
- Turkey and Europe should analyse the burden of migration, regardless of politics.

## **IX. AUTHOR**

### **i. BERAT KJAMILI**

Berat is the 2018 Young Transatlantic Innovation Leaders Initiative Turkey Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. and the U.S. Department of State. He is also the co-founder of Migport.com, an online Q&A mobile app for refugees. He is a graduate of the Middle East Technical University, Department of Economics, and the University of San Diego. He launched the digital appointment "e-residency" system, which 10 million foreigners have used in Turkey. He has also served as an associate expert/expert at the University of San Diego and in European Commission programs. Kjamili is the idea originator of "digital city travel permits to refugees through e-Devlet." He was also a winner of the 2018 Global Student Entrepreneur Awards. Additionally, he has won a further 20 international awards and recognitions. Berat has over ten international publications, books, and reports.

### **ii. ABOUT MIGPORT ([WWW.MIGPORT.COM](http://WWW.MIGPORT.COM))**

Migport's story started in 2016 as a knowledge-sharing platform inspired by its cofounder's migration journey. Today it serves as a mobile app and as a meeting point between locals and refugees. Its structure identifies the problems of refugees by giving them a chance to talk about themselves and ensure social integration with solutions. Migport has over ten international prestigious awards.

## **X. SPECIAL THANKS TO**

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*Yaman Halawi, Yella Global*

*Yusuf Emin, Balkan Media Group*

*And anonymized Migport users...*

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