

Facts on the European Dimension of Displacement and Asylum: Turkey

December 2015

Overview

Demographic Structure

Population	79.4 million
Growth rate	1.26%
Ethnic groups	70-80% Turks, 15-20% Kurds (of those, 24% Zazas), 2% Arabs, other minorities
Languages	Turkish, Kurdish languages, Arabic, other
Religion	99% Muslim (Sunni and Alevi), Christian and Jewish minorities
Median age	30.1 years

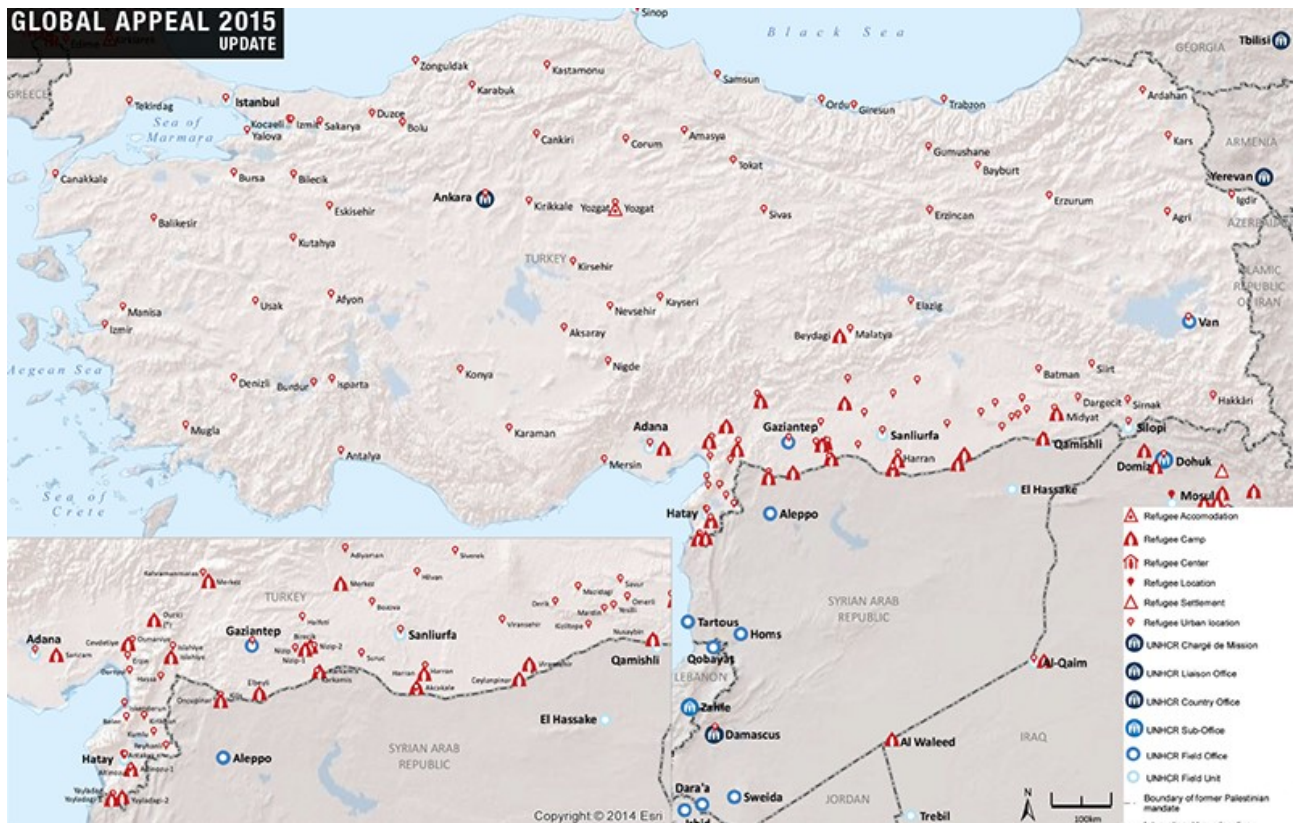
(All figures are for 2014 unless otherwise noted; arrows: change from previous year)

Economics & Employment

GDP (per capita)	\$799.5 bn (\$10,529)	↘
GDP growth	2.9 %	↘
GNI (PPP) (per capita)	\$1,443.4 bn (\$19,020)	↗
Inflation (CPI)	8.9 %	↗
Unemployment	9.9 %	↗
Youth unemployment (15-24)	18.0 %	↗
FDI	\$12.5 bn (2013)	↘
Share of EU 28	11.3 % (2013)	↓
Imports	\$207.8 bn (2013)	↗
Share of EU 28	31.8 % (2013)	↗
Exports	\$149.8 bn (2013)	↘
Share of EU 28	58.8 % (2013)	↗

Political System and Relations with the EU

Type of state/government	Bertelsmann Stiftung, Transformation Index 2014 Status: Defective democracy Officially: Republic / parliamentary democracy
Degree of democratization	Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators 2015 Quality of democracy: 4.4 (scale of 1-10, higher = better) Rang: 40/41, comparable to Romania and Hungary
Human rights and protection of minorities	European Union, 2015 Progress Report for Turkey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of expression is limited in particular through arbitrary interpretation of legislation Freedom of assembly is overly restricted Non-discrimination is not sufficiently enforced Criminal and anti-terror legislation is not yet in line with the European Court of Human Rights case law
Corruption	Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2014 Rank: 64/175, comparable to Oman and Macedonia
Freedom of the press	Freedom House, Freedom of the Press Index 2015 Status: Not free Points: 65 (scale of 0-100, lower = better), comparable to Pakistan und Malaysia
Relations with European Union	Status: Candidate for membership (since 1999), ongoing negotiations (since 2005) Previous steps: Association Agreement (1964), Customs Union for Industrial Goods (1995)



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REFUGEE SITUATION IN TURKEY

Category	Country of origin and transit country
Number	Uncertain; 2.3 million registered Syrians and other refugees from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh
Housing	Some 20% are living in camps, approx. 80% live outside of the camps in Turkish cities in mostly precarious circumstances.
Status of refugees	Refugees and migrants are tolerated as “guests” receiving temporary protection and are not recognized as refugees per se. They therefore receive no social welfare benefits, no work permit, no credit rating and no right to own property.
Funding	UNHCR appealed for \$624 million as part of its Syria Regional Refugee Response for 2015. By December it had received only some 35% of the total amount. According to the Turkish government, it has spent some \$8 billion on the refugee crisis to date.
Irregular border crossings into Greece	581,640 (Jan–Oct 2015) according to the Frontex border protection agency; weather conditions and increased efforts by Turkish authorities are reducing the number of crossings (last week of October: approx. 52,000; last week of November: approx. 5,300). A smaller number of attempts have been made to enter Bulgaria and Ukraine, in addition to Greece.

Turkey is, on the one hand, the country of origin for Kurdish refugees who have left the country as a result of fighting between the Turkish army and the PKK. On the other hand, Turkey is primarily a transit country for migrants and refugees from the neighboring nations of Syria and Iraq, as well as from Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh and for Palestinians from Lebanon.

Turkey's economy – first and foremost its tourist industry – benefits enormously from visa-free travel for people from many countries in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. Among those countries are Syria and Iran, which means many people fleeing warfare or looking to improve their circumstances can take advantage of visa-free entry into Turkey, which then becomes a springboard for their onward journey to Europe.

The some 80 percent of migrants and refugees who live in Turkey's cities instead of its refugee camps, which are mostly in remote locations, exist in "parallel societies" as a result of the lack of opportunities for integration. They create their own internal economies, and some are illegally employed in low-wage jobs.

Outlook

It is highly probable that there will continue to be considerable migrant inflows into Turkey and, subsequently, Europe. The underlying factors are the "guest status" accorded by Turkey coupled with the lack of prospects of returning home; the dynamics generated by the diaspora; the armed conflicts with the Kurds; the precarious situation in the refugee camps in northern Iraq; the wars and conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the ongoing warfare in Syria and northern and western Iraq; and the opportunity people from Iran and from Central and South Asia have to improve their prospects by joining refugees fleeing armed conflicts.

ASSESSMENT

Response to refugees

Turkey is an important transit country and country of origin for migrants and refugees entering the EU. Only in November 2015 did Brussels and Ankara establish a plan for managing the inflow. Turkey is to reduce the number of illegal immigrants entering the EU, improve conditions for refugees and increase border protection.

In return, the EU has announced it will reactivate the accession process, make it easier to obtain visas and pay Ankara some €3 billion over the next two years.

As a result of the refugee crisis and the wars in the Middle East, time is of the essence. Brussels and Ankara must quickly introduce joint measures for protecting both borders and migrants in the Aegean and the Balkans. Turkish authorities require assistance from the EU to manage the borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria. Ankara and Brussels must work together to aid UNHCR as it supplies the refugee camps and improves conditions there. Since most refugees in Turkey find themselves living in precarious circumstances, Ankara and Brussels should create a joint system for providing assistance, which could be financed from the €3 billion "Turkey fund." Since many refugees would like to remain in Turkey for cultural reasons and because of its proximity to their native country, Brussels should use its influence in Ankara to ensure they receive residence permits that allow them to work legally, acquire property, purchase insurance and ensure their children have access to education. In addition, the Turkish government's policy of visa-free travel must be addressed during future negotiations aimed at reducing visa requirements for Turks entering the EU.

Ambivalent regional policy

From the European perspective, Turkey is a key actor in the Balkans as well as a strategic bridgehead in the Near and Middle East and to Central Asia. Along with Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey is one of the regional powers that have a critical role to play in ending the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, since that is where these regional powers are providing support to the various combatants and militias.

At the same time, Ankara's regional policy is ambivalent. It is at odds with the west, since it is taking greater military action against parts of its own Kurdish population, especially the PKK, than it is against the Islamic State (ISIS). Since Ankara supports Iraqi Kurds, it is at odds with Bagdad. Since it is fighting Syrian Kurds, it is at odds with the United States. Finally, Ankara is at odds with Moscow, since Russia is fighting Syrian Turkmens and supporting Syria's dictator, Bashar al-Assad,

whom Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sworn to depose.

This ambivalent regional policy is becoming increasingly costly for Ankara. ISIS terrorist attacks in Turkey are claiming victims, Russian President Vladimir Putin has imposed economic sanctions against Turkey and halted joint energy projects, considerably more money must be spent on military and border protection measures (an additional 25 percent in 2014 alone), and international investment is decreasing.

In sum, Turkey is under pressure in terms of its foreign policy, which is making it possible for the EU to bring its full weight to bear diplomatically as it presses the Turkish government to restart peace negotiations with the Kurds and calls the country to account at the Syria peace talks in Vienna.

“Sultanization”

In keeping with his instinct for amassing power, Erdoğan has self-confidently, brutally and inexorably won out over potential competitors: institutions and power centers such as the country’s military generals, judicial leaders, critical media and Islamist Gülen movement.

Erdoğan enjoys widespread support in his own party, the Islamist AKP, since it is the largest in the country’s parliament and has formed the government. He is in the process of transforming the Turkish republic from a parliamentary to a presidential system and, beyond that, establishing himself in his role as president – residing in a gigantic new palace – as the country’s paramount decision maker. Critics have taken to calling him “the Sultan” as a result.

EU-Turkey relations and financial aid

With 14 chapters having been opened since 2005, the process for Turkey’s joining the EU got off to a vigorous start. Back then the EU was able to exert considerable influence on the country’s domestic policies. As a result, there was greater freedom of the press and more protection of minorities. Peace talks with the Kurds also commenced.

However, the conflict over Cyprus, the interminable debate about whether or not Turkey should join the EU and the increasingly imperious and nationalistic course being pursued by Erdoğan have caused the negotiations to stall, despite communications

channels having been kept open. With that, Brussels has lost any leverage it had over Ankara’s domestic and foreign policies.

Despite the many understandable concerns that Europeans have about the poor quality of Turkey’s democracy and rule of law, the refugee crisis and the wars in the Middle East are forcing Brussels to take serious steps toward re-engaging with Ankara. If the EU’s 28 members were to act as one, their chances of influencing Turkey’s domestic and foreign policies would increase. Yet the European Commission and the member states are still haggling over where the €3 billion for the “Turkey fund” are to come from. The EU summit on December 17 and 18 is supposed to clarify that situation. Countries willing to contribute want to punish recalcitrant members indirectly by reducing the funds they receive from the EU. Since the EU’s budget has already been finalized until 2020, any “punishment” would only be possible thereafter. The conflict over funding reflects the disagreement among EU member states about which strategies to deploy to overcome the refugee crisis.

Last but not least, Brussels also needs to pressure Cyprus to improve its relations with the island’s inhabitants in the north and with Turkey.

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