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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP)
Subject:	Status on the EU cooperation with Türkiye in the area of migration

Introduction

The cooperation on migration with Türkiye has historically been built on a pragmatic and holistic approach due to Türkiye's geographical location and the deep political, historical, social and economic ties between Türkiye, the EU and its Members States. Türkiye is first and foremost a destination country as one of the largest refugee hosting countries in the world, but also a country of transit and origin in the context of migration movements to the EU¹. The cooperation with Türkiye as a candidate country for the EU membership remains complex. Continuous engagement with the authorities on matters related to migration is needed to drive both the political and technical cooperation between the EU and Türkiye.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament - Eighth Annual Report of the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52024DC0593> (hereafter “8th report on FRiT”)

Domestically, the situation in the areas of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights is deeply worrying. Particularly worrisome are the continued systemic lack of independence and undue pressure on the judiciary, the many restrictions on free and safe expression, including media freedom and dissemination of information, as well as the dismissals and replacements of democratically elected municipal mayors. Since the beginning of the year, the human rights situation has deteriorated further, amid increased pressure on the mainstream opposition, including the 19 March arrest of Istanbul Mayor Imamoğlu and subsequent arrests of further mayors from the Republicans People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), replaced in several cases by trustees.

On the economic situation, in December 2024 the Council welcomed the shift towards more conventional and tighter economic policies since mid-2023 and encouraged Türkiye to continue implementing stability-oriented macroeconomic policies and addressing concerns about the proper functioning of Türkiye's market economy and institutional and regulatory environment. Respect of rule of law, democracy, media freedom and human rights, continue to play a key role in sustaining economic confidence and facilitating the business environment.

The EU-Türkiye migration cooperation was last discussed in the EMWP on 29 November 2024, and in relation to the Action Plan on the Eastern Mediterranean Route in MOCADDEM on 17 February and 23 July 2025, and in Coreper on 2 April 2025. The discussions confirmed that Türkiye remained a key partner on migration, notwithstanding the challenging cooperation at both technical and political level. In addition, Member States and the Commission reconfirmed the importance of continuing the implementation of the "EU-Turkey Statement" (hereafter 'the Statement') from 18 March 2016², and to prioritise persistent engagement in this regard.

Following the latest developments in Syria and in the region, a concerning economic situation in Türkiye, and a mixed pattern on the irregular flows from Türkiye to the EU in recent years, the Presidency finds it timely to have a comprehensive discussion on the cooperation with Türkiye at the EMWP. This paper outlines the main frameworks for cooperation on migration between the EU and Türkiye, including state of play on the cooperation, and the current migration situation. Finally, it discusses the EU-Türkiye cooperation on migration in the broader context of the comprehensive partnership approach and the way forward on the cooperation.

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>.

Main frameworks of cooperation with Türkiye

Triggered by the Syrian refugee and migrant crisis in 2015, the EU and Türkiye had activated the **Joint Action Plan on Migration** in order to step up cooperation for the support of Syrian refugees under temporary protection and their host communities in Türkiye and to strengthen cooperation to prevent irregular migration flows to the EU³.

Following that and in response to a call from Member States for significant additional funding to support refugees in Türkiye, the Commission established the **Facility for Refugees in Türkiye (FRiT ‘the Facility’)** on 24 November 2015 with the aim of establishing a mechanism through which to coordinate the mobilization of resources under the EU budget and additional contributions from Member States⁴. The total budget of the Facility amounts to EUR 6 billion mobilised in two tranches and funded equally through the EU budget and bilateral contributions by Member States. In 2020, an additional EUR 535 million was committed to ensure continuation of humanitarian assistance to refugees in Türkiye. In addition, the European Council allocated EUR 3 billion in 2021, and EUR 2 billion in 2024 to maintain the humanitarian assistance for refugees and host communities and effective migration cooperation. Since 2011, the total EU assistance allocated to refugees in Türkiye amounts to EUR 12.5 billion⁵. The FRiT and the additional refugee funding that followed targets a number of areas, including education, protection, health, municipal infrastructure, basic needs and socio-economic support and migration management.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo_15_5860.

⁴ 8th report on FRiT.

⁵ 8th report on FRiT.

The **EU-Türkiye Statement** signed on 18 March 2016 initiated the comprehensive cooperation on migration that remains to this day the overall political framework for the cooperation between the EU and Türkiye on the migration agenda, outlining comprehensive cooperation on migration based on shared responsibility and mutual commitments. Some of the main elements of the Statement are: 1) all irregular migrants and asylum seekers, whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible, crossing from Türkiye into the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016 will be returned to Türkiye, in accordance with international obligations and the respect of the principle of non-refoulement; 2) For every Syrian returned to Türkiye, another Syrian will be resettled from Türkiye taking into account the UN vulnerability criteria; 3) Türkiye will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Türkiye to the EU, and will cooperate with neighbouring states as well as the EU to this effect; 4) The fulfilment of the visa liberalization roadmap was to be accelerated with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens, provided that all benchmarks had been met. In addition, the statement reconfirmed the EU and Türkiye's commitment to "re-energise" the accession process and a commitment to improve the humanitarian conditions inside Syria⁶.

At the 20th steering committee meeting of the Facility in June 2025, the Chair noted that the Statement "continues to deliver tangible results despite challenging circumstances", and that "constant engagement with Türkiye on all matters related to migration" was needed. The total number of persons returned from the Greek islands to Türkiye under the EU-Turkey Statement stands at 2 253. At the same time, 44 046 persons have been resettled to the EU under the EU- Türkiye Statement since April 2016. Because of the Turkish authorities' decision to not revoke the suspension of return operations as of March 2020, no return operations have taken place since then, despite repeated requests from the European Commission and the Greek authorities.⁷ With regard to visa liberalisation, the Chair noted at the 20th steering committee of the Facility that "there had been no tangible progress on the six outstanding benchmarks of the visa liberalisation roadmap".

⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>.

⁷ 8th report on FRiT.

Accession negotiations with Türkiye have remained at a standstill since 2018, in line with the European Council Conclusions. The EU's serious concerns about the continued deterioration of democratic standards, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and respect for fundamental rights were not addressed.

The EU-Türkiye High Level Dialogue on Migration and Security, led by Commissioner Brunner and Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, took place in Istanbul on 2 July 2025 in a constructive atmosphere. Türkiye's main interest was on Schengen visa related matters for Turkish nationals, to which the Commission recalled the standing offer on technical support on the outstanding benchmarks in the visa liberalisation dialogue. On migration, shared interest in well-organised returns to Syria offer a possibility for cooperation. Furthermore, the Commission recalled the need to hold a joint EU- Türkiye Readmission Committee (not held since 2016) and to strengthen cooperation with Frontex and on migrant smuggling including through the Global Alliance. On these issues, the Dialogue provided no concrete commitments from Türkiye. However, Türkiye did provide an overview of its efforts to contain irregular migration at its external borders, which brought about the overall decrease of arrivals to the EU in 2025, so far. On security, both parties agreed to enhance cooperation on exchange of information, through Europol and EMPACT, both on countering terrorism and drug trafficking.

In addition to the cooperation outlined above, delegations will find an Annex with a description of further areas of cooperation with Türkiye, including on readmission, border and migration management, as well as countering migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

Migration situation

According to the Turkish Presidency for Migration Management (PMM), Türkiye hosted 2.5 million Syrians on temporary protection as per 21 August 2025. In addition, and as per figures of December 2024, Türkiye is also hosting some 193 000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Ukraine, and other countries of origin under international protection.

Since 2022, Turkish nationals have figured relatively high in terms of the number of asylum applications lodged in the EU27, although the pattern is mixed with 48 600 first time asylum applications in 2022 (mainly in Germany), 89 990 in 2023 and 46 840 in 2024, according to data from Eurostat. According to the EUAA, the recognition rate of first instance decisions for Turkish asylum applications in the EU27 in 2024 was 17.5 %. As per 19 August, Turkish nationals had lodged 20 545 asylum applications in the EU+-countries in 2025, a 40% decrease compared to the same period in 2024, according to operational data from the EUAA. According to the latest ISAA Report, irregular border crossings (IBCs) on the Eastern Mediterranean route to the EU have decreased by 20% as per 17 August 2025 (28 488) compared to the same period in 2024 (35 470), a substantial decrease bearing in mind that the figures for 2025 is also including the 9 989 IBCs registered from Libya to Crete during that period.

Way forward

The establishment of the Facility and EU-Türkiye Statement can be argued to constitute a ground-breaking innovation in terms of establishing a comprehensive framework on migration cooperation between EU and a third country. Approaching the 10th year of implementing the Facility and the Statement and in light of the developments in Syria and the broader conflict in the Middle East, the Presidency considers it essential for the EMWP to reflect on the way forward for the EU-Türkiye cooperation on the migration agenda. With regard to the main policy objectives of the Statement, providing international protection to a large number of Syrians and preventing irregular migration from Türkiye to the EU, the Statement and the Facility can be considered a success, notwithstanding the challenging cooperation with regard to the ‘one-for-one’ mechanism and on return and readmission, as well as the substantial financial resources allocated to this cooperation.

According to data from UNHCR there were around 861 000 irregular arrivals to Greece in 2015 followed by around 178 000 irregular arrivals in 2016⁸. According to available data from FRONTEX⁹, the number of irregular arrivals from Türkiye to Greece in 2017 was 43 175. From 2017 to 2019 the number of irregular arrivals increased steadily (54 321 in 2018; 77 524 in 2019). In 2020-2021, due to Covid-19, arrivals from Türkiye to Greece significantly decreased (19 826 in 2020; 35 026 in 2021). From 2022 to 2024 arrivals resumed their upward trend (54 401 in 2022; 63 228 in 2023; 65 724 in 2024). According to IOM data¹⁰, the number of dead and missing migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean Route declined from 804 cases in 2015 to 62 in 2017. The number of dead and missing migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean route between 2018 and 2024 was 1 207, with the highest number recorded in 2022 (383).

The cooperation between the EU and Türkiye in the framework of the Statement and the Facility has also been fraught with tension and widely criticized, particularly by human-rights advocates and humanitarian organizations arguing that the EU abandoned its humanitarian protection responsibilities by having Türkiye hosting asylum seekers. Tensions arose in 2020 when Türkiye showed discontent with the pace and manner of the funds disbursed through the Facility, by allowing migrants to pass through its territory to the Greek border. A situation that led to the accusation that President Erdogan was using asylum seekers as leverage to extract additional funds and other political concessions from Europe.¹¹

⁸ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/europe-sea-arrivals/location/24489>.

⁹ Data is **SENSITIVE**; not for public use. In line with the EUROSUR Data Management Policy and Data Collection Plan, data broken down by Member States cannot be shared publicly without prior consent from the respective Member States. Data is limited for use within European Union institutions, other offices and agencies established by virtue or on the basis of the Treaties, EU Member States' public administrations.

¹⁰ [Mediterranean | Missing Migrants Project](#)

¹¹ Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eu-turkey-deal-five-years-on>. Available on 7 July 2025.

Considering the vast number of services provided to refugees under the Facility and subsequent funding, including with regard to education, health care and basic needs-services, the framework with Türkiye illustrates how the EU can cooperate comprehensively with third countries on the migration agenda. The Facility thus provided protection to people in the region and close to their country of origin, while preventing dangerous journeys at sea and irregular arrivals to the EU, thereby also disincentivising the use of migrant smugglers. While it is still too early to predict whether the fall of the regime in Syria will be followed by a stable situation, it is worth noting that protection of Syrians in the nearby regions enable them to easier assess and realize their wish of returning home when the situation in the country allows it. By 14 August 2025, 411 649 Syrians had voluntarily returned from Türkiye to Syria since 8 December 2024. **Looking ahead, there is a need to tackle remaining funding gaps for Syrian refugees in the region, while facilitating voluntary returns and reintegration in Syria. Continued support to Türkiye and the Syrian authorities for reconstruction in Syria is equally important to enable Syrians to return home in a safe and dignified manner.**

The Presidency asks the delegations to consider the following questions for the discussion:

1. What is the state of play on Member States' bilateral cooperation with Türkiye? Any recent contacts with Turkish authorities? Any key migration projects to inform the EMWP about?
2. How do Member States assess the overall migration cooperation between the EU and Türkiye, including the implementation of the Facility, post-Facility additional refugee funding, and the Statement?
3. What do Member States consider as main priorities of the EU's migration cooperation with Türkiye going forward, in light of the developments in Syria and the broader conflict in the Middle East?
4. Do Member States consider the framework, including the 'one-for-one' mechanism, as an example to pursue in cooperation with other third countries outside Europe, with the aim of providing protection in nearby regions and preventing irregular migration to the EU?

STATUS ON SELECTED ADDITIONAL AREAS OF COOPERATION WITH TÜRKİYE**Readmission Agreement**

There is a Readmission Agreement between the EU and Türkiye, in force since 1 October 2014.

The agreement is implemented for what concerns Turkish nationals but not for third country nationals. Türkiye retains the position that it will not implement the third country nationals' clause until it is exempted from the Schengen short-stay visa obligation. Moreover, Türkiye does not implement the agreement towards Cyprus. The EU's expectation is that the agreement is implemented in full and towards all Member States. The last Joint Readmission Committee meeting took place in 2016, while such meetings are supposed to take place every six months. In 2024, the rate of returns was 30% with 25 590 Turkish nationals ordered to leave and 7 775 returned (27% in 2023 with 20 765 Turkish nationals ordered to leave and 5 525 returned).

Cooperation on border and migration management

A total of EUR 878 million has been allocated to migration management support under the Facility and additional refugee support, excluding HOME funding. Under the Facility, two projects totalling EUR 80 million were completed, enhancing the Turkish coastguard's search and rescue capacity and supporting Türkiye's Presidency for Migration Management in managing EU returns. In 2024, three projects under additional refugee support (EUR 30 million) were implemented to strengthen Türkiye's migration management, focusing on countering irregular migration, improving airport border management, and supporting removal centres. A EUR 220 million contract, signed in December 2023, aims to enhance eastern and south-eastern border management. Another EUR 398 million were allocated in 2024 to support Türkiye's migration and border management capacity, with a focus on voluntary returns to Syria, protection procedures, migrant smuggling prevention, and border security.

Cooperation on counter-smuggling

Türkiye continues to play a pivotal role as both a transit and origin country for irregular migration by land, sea, and air. In recent years, cooperation between Türkiye, the European Commission, EU agencies, and Member States in the fight against migrant smuggling has intensified and is yielding concrete results. Notably, Türkiye has enhanced its operational engagement with Frontex and Europol and participates actively in key initiatives such as the EMPACT platform and the Scope II programme (Fighting Migrant Smuggling by Establishing Common Operational Partnerships in Europe with Türkiye). Under the 2024–2025 EMPACT Operational Action Plan on Migrant Smuggling, Türkiye is involved in three operational actions targeting smuggling networks, particularly along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Collaboration has also expanded in addressing irregular migration by air, with Turkish authorities and airlines working with Commission services to enhance screening and data-sharing procedures. A second technical workshop took place on 11 February 2025, confirming Türkiye’s willingness to treat air-based irregular migration as a shared EU-Türkiye challenge. Türkiye is also an active participant in the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling and will be invited to the upcoming inter-ministerial conference on 10 December 2025.

Discussions are currently ongoing to update and sign a new working arrangement between Türkiye and Frontex, which would enable expanded cooperation, including the reactivation of the Frontex-Türkiye Risk Analysis Network that has been dormant since 2019. Meanwhile, operational collaboration with Europol continues under the existing strategic agreement (called Working Arrangement under the current legal framework), which cannot be the legal basis to exchange personal data; hence the lack of an EU-Türkiye international agreement enabling the exchange of personal data with the Agency remains a limiting factor. Although good progress was made with our rounds held so far, the latest being in 2021, the conclusion of the agreement is on hold pending data protection reforms in Türkiye. The agreement is also linked to visa liberalisation benchmarks.

Cooperation on combating trafficking in human beings

Türkiye is a country of source, transit and destination of victims of trafficking; therefore it is essential to reinforce its legal institutional and operational framework of combating trafficking in human beings and protecting the victims. The EU dedicated two funding programs for these objectives. The first program is the 2018 IPA project on “EU Support to Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings”, the implementation of which started in 2022 by IOM and it runs for 5 years. The second program “P-ACT was launched in 2023 under the Migration Partnership Framework and will be completed by the end of 2025. It aims at the reduction of trafficking in human beings in Türkiye through ensuring early identification, referral and adequate assistance and support to victims of trafficking in human beings and the prevention of new cases. Türkiye adopted the 3rd National Action Plan in February 2025.
