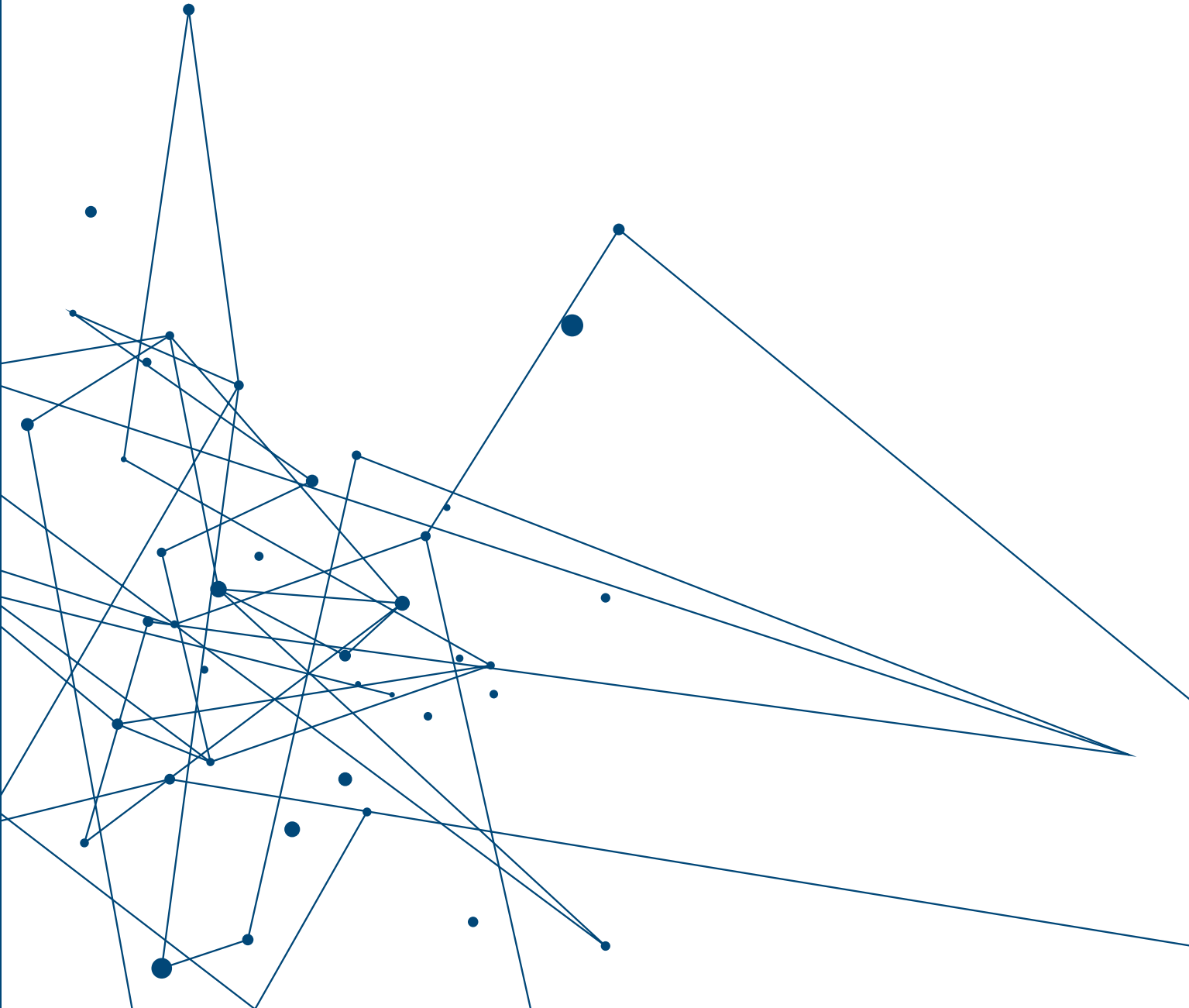


CATS NETWORK PAPER | NO. 17 | 17.06.2025

# The Political Feasibility of the UNDP's Proposal for a Türkiye Compact

Kemal Kirişci and Friedrich Püttmann



The legacy of the 2015 refugee crisis still affects migration policy across Europe, as reflected in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum as well as recent national policy initiatives and election results in various EU member states. In response to the need to develop more sustainable migration and refugee policies, this report formulates recommendations on how the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) proposal for a "Türkiye Compact" (TC) could contribute to addressing this challenge and offer more sustainable long-term solutions for Turkey, its Syrian refugees and the EU. The UNDP's proposal is inspired by the Global Compact on Refugees, which advocates for the extension of trade preferences to countries hosting large numbers of refugees in return for their facilitation of refugees' access to formal jobs. Despite the initial euphoria created by the recent regime change in Syria in December 2024 and the accompanying prospects of refugee returns, the UNDP's proposal remains relevant. The persistent instability and massive destruction in Syria render the local landscape one which is not yet conducive to the repatriation of all of Turkey's Syrian refugees. Furthermore, despite all the political challenges identified in this report, the "Türkiye Compact" also has the potential to become a general model for future cooperation on migration and refugees between the Global North and South. This is especially pertinent at a time of growing competition for diminishing funds for humanitarian assistance, in a world of ever-growing displacement crises and rapid growth of the political far-right. Parties of the political centre now need sustainable solutions to manage irregular migration across countries in the long run, and the "Türkiye Compact" may indeed contribute to this endeavour.

This research report is based on the CATS Network project, "The Political Feasibility of the Adoption of the UNDP's "Türkiye Compact" by the EU, the UK and Switzerland", conducted by Contemporary Turkish Studies at the European Institute of the London School of Economics (LSE) from December 2023 to December 2024. The results of this project were presented in Brussels, Geneva, London and finally Berlin on 07 December 2024, where a policy brief named "*The UNDP's Proposal for a 'Türkiye Compact': Is it Politically Feasible?*", CATS Network Brief, No. 01, 03.12.2024 was circulated. This research report forms the basis of the policy brief and provides a deeper analysis of the project's findings. [Yaprak Gürsoy](#) served as the supervisor of this project. We are also indebted to the many interviewees who kindly shared their time and insights, and we extend our sincere gratitude to all of them.

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1.

# The UNDP's "Türkiye Compact" as a Novel Approach to Protracted Refugee Situations

Turkey continues to host the largest number of refugees in the world since 2014. In the absence of durable solutions in the form of voluntary returns, resettlement or local integration, the presence of refugees in Turkey has become protracted. Refugees have access to government-provided basic public services and support for basic needs - mostly financed by the EU - but economic challenges force them into precarious informal employment and increasing competition with locals, which fuels refugee resentment. In the meantime, the EU is incurring high costs for its humanitarian assistance in Turkey and is looking to reduce them amidst donor fatigue while humanitarian crises in the vicinity of Europe are multiplying. Although the unexpected regime change in Syria in December 2024 fuelled a sense of 'return euphoria' among refugees and host communities, realities on the ground at the time of writing still fail to be conducive to any large-scale repatriation of Turkey's Syrian refugees. This is recognised by both the UNHCR and Turkey's President Erdoğan himself.

It is against this background that the UNDP's "Türkiye Compact" (TC) proposal deserves attention as an innovative approach to managing the prevailing precarity and the accompanying protracted refugee situation. The TC suggests that the EU, the US and Canada extend preferential access to their markets for Turkish agricultural products and textiles, and in return, Turkey facilitates access to formal jobs for refugees in Turkey. This would create 284,000 jobs in Turkey of which 20 per cent would go to refugees. The proposal is inspired by the Global Compact on Refugees, which calls for transitioning from humanitarian to developmental approaches to improve refugees' self-reliance and host communities' resilience. The proposal, at a time of ever-growing humanitarian crises across the globe, also has a relevance beyond Turkey as it carries the potential to relieve pressure on donor countries to mobilise scarce funding sources.

This research report discusses the results of our CATS/SWP-funded study examining whether the adoption of the TC by the EU, the UK and Switzerland is politically feasible. The study identified the key political factors shaping the TC's chances of adoption in the EU, focusing on Germany as Turkey's main trading partner and a key player in the EU, especially with regard to the EU's cooperation on migration with Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Through 50 interviews with policymakers, officials and third-sector experts in Ankara, Istanbul, Brussels, Geneva, Berlin, London and Bern, we gained insights into what may drive an adoption of the TC and what may obstruct it.

Overall, many of our interlocutors recognised the TC as very innovative and compatible with WTO (World Trade Organization) principles, with the potential to minimise irregular migration to the EU and to make the EU-Turkey Statement from 2016 - as well as future migration agreements - more sustainable.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, some interviewees thought an engagement with the TC could support a positive agenda with Turkey. Yet, many also saw political obstacles. European farmers may resist the TC due to concerns about competition. There were doubts about Turkey's commitment to integrating Syrian refugees, along with distrust in the Turkish government per se. And many EU politicians considered the refugee issue in Turkey 'solved', and were thus reluctant to engage in promoting the TC amidst other crises. Some interviewees also warned that the TC may be wrongly perceived as a 'modernisation of the customs union through the backdoor' and thus raise opposition. Finally, occasional scepticism remained regarding its effectiveness in preventing irregular secondary movements. In conclusion, while the "Türkiye Compact" has the potential to offer sustainable solutions for refugees and host communities, its political feasibility hinges on addressing these obstacles and fostering cooperation among a broader set of stakeholders, including UN agencies and most importantly the US. To move the TC forward, we suggest, based on our interviews, to start with a test run in the shape of a "small TC", covering only some agricultural products that are less likely to create political difficulties, and incrementally seeking supporters around the globe.

The developments in Syria that have unfolded since the completion of our study, we believe, reinforce the relevance of the UNDP's proposal. The TC could be rethought as a proposal that, beside its original goal of supporting refugee self-reliance and host

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<sup>1</sup> Natascha Zaun and Friedrich Püttmann, "Beyond Transactionalism: Germany's Role in Intra-EU and EU-Turkey Cooperation on Migration during the Syrian Refugee Crisis", *German Politics* (28 April 2025): 1-22, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09644008.2025.2497076#abstract> (accessed 10 May 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Püttmann, "Why migration agreements are the best way to defend the Geneva Convention", *London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) EUROPP* (blog), 04 April 2023, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2023/04/04/why-migration-agreements-are-the-best-way-to-defend-the-geneva-convention/> (accessed 23 March 2025); Sinem Adar and Friedrich Püttmann, *Making EU-Turkey Cooperation on Migration Sustainable*, SWP Comment 2022/C07 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], February 2022), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C07/> (accessed 23 March 2025).

community resilience in Turkey specifically, could assist a transition period until the circumstances conducive to return in Syria emerge. Formal and sustainable employment can help refugees to make a modest contribution to the reconstruction of Syria by enabling refugees to put aside enough savings to invest in creating the circumstances for eventual household return. As prospects of return become real, visible public resentment may well ease enough for the Turkish government to consider the possibility of allowing full local integration in the form of eventual citizenship for some of the refugees. In this regard we would suggest that, with the regime change in Syria, the long dormant Article 9 of the EU-Turkey Statement from 2016 advocating for closer cooperation between the EU and Turkey in Syria should be revisited for possible coordination with respect to supporting the emergence of the conditions for sustainable and voluntary refugee returns.

The report is divided into eight sections. In the following section, we start by emphasising the need for more sustainable refugee policies, before taking a snapshot of the current refugee situation in Turkey to explain what renders this situation protracted. We then move on to the third section which discusses the details of the UNDP's TC proposal as a policy that may help to address this protracted reality. After a brief explanation of our methodology, we offer the results of our research and interviews in two separate sections: one focusing on those considerations that may help the prospects of the TC's adoption, and the other discussing the factors that stand in the way of its adoption. We conclude our analysis by discussing a set of factors that might help improve the adoptability of the TC, and recommend the initial adoption of a "small TC" covering a short list of agricultural products that are less likely to meet resistance from European farmers. This could be used as a confidence-building step to generate momentum for the gradual expansion of the list of products benefiting from trade preferences. We also flag that closer cooperation and coordination between the EU and Turkey in supporting the development of favourable conditions for refugee returns would be a win-win for all, and briefly discuss how the TC could be reconceptualised as a measure to support the reconstruction in Syria.

2.

# The Need for more Sustainability in International Refugee Policy

As of 2023, 43.4 million refugees worldwide have been under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>3</sup> Most of these refugees are hosted in countries in the Global South, and remain in protracted situations without access to durable solutions in the form of voluntary return, resettlement, or local integration.<sup>4</sup> The root causes of most displacement crises remain unresolved, and countries in the Global North are increasingly restrictive towards asylum seekers. Resettlement efforts tend to fall short, with only 427,700 refugees resettled yearly on average, while local integration in the form of naturalisation benefited only about 45,410 refugees annually between 2019 and 2023. Likewise, less than 682,000 refugees on average per year returned during this period.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of durable solutions, refugees increasingly face precarity and dependence on humanitarian assistance, which is costly to many donor countries in the Global North, including the EU. The 2024 Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) estimated a financial need of \$48.65 billion to support 186.5 million people across 71

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023* (Copenhagen, 13 June 2024), <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/global-trends-report-2023.pdf> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>4</sup> A “protracted refugee situation” is one where refugees have been without access to a durable solution for 5 or more years after their initial displacement. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, Executive Committee 61st Session, Extraordinary Meeting, *Conclusion on Protracted Refugee Situations No. 109 (LXI) – 2009* (Geneva, 08 December 2009), <https://www.unhcr.org/us/publications/conclusion-protracted-refugee-situations> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Figures calculated from the table titled *Figure 15: Durable solutions for refugees: 2019–2023*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2024: 40. Please note that the web version of the table is live and constantly being updated by UNHCR as each yearly *Global Trends* reported gets posted.

countries, but only 25 per cent of this amount (\$12.26 billion) was raised.<sup>6</sup> This exacerbates the gap between growing needs and available funding amidst donor fatigue and a shortage of resources as crises multiply.<sup>7</sup>

While the 1951 Refugee Convention grants refugees the right to work, only a few countries in the Global South give refugees access to their formal labour market, given bureaucratic obstacles and high unemployment rates among their citizens.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, many refugees are drawn into informal employment, which exposes them to exploitation and provokes tensions with host communities, some of whom fear that refugees drive down their wages and undermine their access to jobs. The resulting anti-refugee sentiment among host communities then fuels secondary migration to Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024*, June–July Update, Snapshot as of 31 July 2024 (New York, 08 August 2024), <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-monthly-updates/article/june-and-july-update> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Nick Cumming–Bruce, “Despite Wars, Earthquakes and Hurricanes, U.N. Cuts Appeal for Aid”, *New York Times* (online), 11 December 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/11/world/europe/united-nations-humanitarian-aid-appeal.html> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Ginn, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold–Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble and Bahati Kanyamanza, 2022 *Global Refugee Work Rights Report* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development [CGD], 2022), [https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report\\_0.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report_0.pdf), (accessed 03 April 2025); Thomas Ginn, *Labor Market Access and Outcomes for Refugees*, *JDC Quarterly Digest*, no. 7 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] Joint Data Center, January 2023), [https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/JDC-Quarterly-Digest\\_January-2023.pdf](https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/JDC-Quarterly-Digest_January-2023.pdf) (accessed 03 April 2025).

3.

# The Case of Turkey

3.1

## Syrian Refugees in Turkey and the Absence of Durable Solutions

Turkey provides an illustrative example of these challenges as the country hosting the largest number of refugees worldwide, with 2.9 million Syrian refugees as of December 2024 and another almost 195,000 individuals under international protection.<sup>9</sup> In 2014, the Turkish government granted a temporary protection status to Syrian refugees, giving them access to free public services like health and education.<sup>10</sup> It has now been more than 13 years since the Syrian refugees began to arrive in Turkey, and Turkish policy towards them appears to have stalled. In early phases, the government had presented their presence as temporary, and the public had received Syrian refugees with considerable compassion. However, the government's assumption that the regime in Syria would soon collapse and the refugees would return to a new Syria did not materialise. Instead, they simply became increasingly settled as a function of piecemeal government policy that lacked a long-term plan. Government policies oscillated between emphasising return on the one hand, and enabling even formal local integration by toying with opening the way to

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<sup>9</sup> Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Presidency of Migration Management, *Geçici Koruma [Temporary Protection]*, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> (accessed 30 December 2024); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Türkiye, *Türkiye Fact Sheet* (Ankara, September 2024), <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/media/bi-annual-fact-sheet-2024-09-turkiye-pdf> (accessed 30 December 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, *Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği [Temporary Protection Regulation]*, Resmi Gazete No. 29153 (Ankara, 22 October 2014), <https://www.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/goc.gov.tr/evraklar/mevzuat/Gecici-Koruma.pdf> (accessed 03 April 2025); Republic of Turkey, Presidency of Migration Management, *General Principles of Temporary Protection*, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/general-principles-of-temporary-protection> (accessed 03 April 2025). In 2019, Turkey claimed that \$4.0 billion had been spent on refugees since 2011. However, no updated figures are publicly available since then. Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Directorate of Communications, *Erdoğan: Türkiye is Stepping Up Where Others Fail to Act* (Ankara, 14 October 2019), [https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/cumhurbaskanimizin\\_kaleminden/detay/erdogan-turkey-is-stepping-up-where-others-fail-to-act](https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/cumhurbaskanimizin_kaleminden/detay/erdogan-turkey-is-stepping-up-where-others-fail-to-act) (accessed 03 April 2025).

naturalisation on the other.<sup>11</sup> This policy of “pragmatic muddling through”<sup>12</sup> has ultimately exhausted itself as Turkey’s Syrian refugees find themselves in protracted situations.

Voluntary return – Turkey’s preferred solution – remains unrealistic because of an unfavourable environment in Syria, as highlighted by the former High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, prior to the fall of the regime of the Syrian president Bashar – al Assad.<sup>13</sup> The conflict at the core of the initial displacement persists, and the prospect of its solution is far from assured; even after the regime in Damascus recently changed.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the Turkish government, as of early 2024, had reported close to 625,000 returns to parts of Syria controlled by Turkey.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the UNHCR put the total number of monitored returns from Turkey to Syria at 186,400 as of 30 June 2024.<sup>16</sup>

The dramatic events in Syria in December 2024 culminating in the swift collapse of the Assad regime led to considerable euphoria both among Syrian refugees<sup>17</sup> and their

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<sup>11</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (TCCB), “President Erdoğan Shares Fast-Breaking Dinner with Refugees in Kilis”, Press release (Ankara, 02 July 2016), <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/45576/suriyeli-kardeslerimize-vatandaslik-imkni-verecegiz> (accessed 03 April 2025); in contrast, see Nazlan Ertan, “Erdoğan unveils plans to send 1 million Syrians back as anti-refugee sentiment escalates,” *Al-Monitor* (online), 04 May 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/05/erdogan-unveils-plans-send-1-million-syrians-back-anti-refugee-sentiment> (accessed 03 April 2025); for a presentation of the government’s policies with a focus on return, see the remarks by the Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya in Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM) Plan ve Bütçe Komisyonu [Turkish Grand National Assembly Planning and Budget Committee], *Tutanak Dergisi [Minuties Journal]*, 14. Toplantı (Ankara, 08 November 2023): 13, [https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/komisyon\\_tutanaklari.goruntule?pTutanakId=3183](https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/komisyon_tutanaklari.goruntule?pTutanakId=3183) (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Sophia Hoffmann and Sahizer Samuk, *Turkish Immigration Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis*, WP 2016/01 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], Research Division Global Issues), March 2016: 9.

<sup>13</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), “Syria: Opening remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the Ministerial session of the 8th Brussels Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’”, Press release (Brussels, 27 May 2024), [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-opening-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ministerial-session-8th\\_en?s=209](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-opening-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ministerial-session-8th_en?s=209) (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>14</sup> UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, “Briefing Security Council, Special Envoy for Syria Urges All Actors ‘Engage with UN to Move Forward Political Process in Line with Resolution 2254 (2015)’”, Press Release (New York, 22 July 2024), <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15772.doc.htm> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Okan Coşkun and İbrahim Özcan, “İçişleri Bakanı Yerlikaya: 625 bine yakın Suriyeli ülkesine geri dönüş kapsamında geçiş yaptı” [Minister of Interior Yerlikaya: Nearly 625 thousand Syrians crossed to their country within the scope of repatriation], *Anadolu Ajansı (AA)* (online), 16 February 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/icisleri-bakani-yerlikaya-625-bine-yakin-suriyeli-ulkesine-geri-donus-kapsaminda-gecis-yapti/3139459> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Operational Data Portal (ODP), *Syria Regional Refugee Response* (Ankara: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 30 June 2024), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria?> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Oman Al Yahyai, “Syrian refugees in Turkey begin returning home as al-Assad regime falls”, *Euronews* (online), 10 December 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/12/10/syrian-refugees-in-turkey-begin-returning-home-as-al-assads-regime-falls> (accessed 03 April 2025);

hosts<sup>18</sup> at large (both in Turkey and in Europe more widely) about their speedy return. However, realities on the ground – ranging from utter physical destruction in the regions of Syria where most of the refugees in Turkey came from to the political uncertainty reigning in Syria more generally – quickly tempered the expectations of return.<sup>19</sup> Over the course of two months since the change of regime, almost 82,000 returns have been reported by the Turkish government<sup>20</sup> accompanied by a general recognition that additional returns will depend heavily on the political and economic stabilisation of Syria and its physical reconstruction. In short, it remains unclear what is going to happen in Syria in the near future, and how many Syrian refugees will eventually be able to return in a truly safe and dignified manner, as Turkey’s President has repeatedly said should be the case.<sup>21</sup>

Resettlement, as another durable solution, has not been very promising for Syrian refugees in Turkey either. According to the Turkish government, almost 70,000 resettlements occurred between 2016 and August 2024, of which 45,000 went to EU member countries on the basis of the EU–Turkey Statement from March 2016.<sup>22</sup> The

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Göksel Göksu, “Suriyeliler sınır kapısında anlatıyor: ‘Türkiye’ye teşekkürler ama artık vatanımıza dönmek istiyoruz” [Syrians tell at the border crossing: “Thanks to Turkey, but now we want to return to our homeland”], *Medyascope* (online), 18 December 2024, <https://medyascope.tv/2024/12/18/suriyeliler-anlatiyor-turkiyeye-tesekkurler-ama-donmek-istiyorum/> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Faiola and Kate Brady, “After Assad’s fall, some say it’s time for Syrian refugees to go home”, *Washington Post* (online), 09 December 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/09/syrian-refugees-return-assad-europe/> (accessed 03 April 2025);

Juliana Kim, “One family thought they had left Syria forever. After Assad’s fall, they plan to return”, *National Public Radio (NPR)* (online), 11 December 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/11/nx-s1-5221666/syria-refugees-reaction-assad-future> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Dorian Jones, “Time to go home? Assad’s demise brings dilemmas for Syrian refugees in Turkey”, *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* (online), 11 January 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/podcasts/international-media/20250111-time-to-go-home-assad-s-demise-brings-dilemmas-for-syrian-refugees-in-turkey> (accessed 03 April 2025).

Report prepared by Mülteciler Derneği and based on a field study showing how Syria is for a range of reasons far from being in a state conducive to receiving refugees back: Mülteciler Derneği, *Saha Gözlem Raporu: Suriye ‘Esad gitti ama Suriye hâlâ karanlık’* [Field Observation Report: Syria ‘Assad is gone but Syria is still dark’] (Istanbul, 11 March 2025), <https://multeciler.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Suriye-Saha-Gozlem-Raporu-TR.pdf> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>20</sup> Haber Merkezi, “Ülkesine dönen Suriyeli sayısı açıklandı” [Number of Syrians returning to their country announced], *NTV Türkiye* (online), 29 January 2025, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/ulkesine-donen-suriyeli-sayisi-aciklandi,jIB4Yf1TREmVkbLRBsK9kw> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Most recently when he emphasised this point soon after the fall of the Assad regime: Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Presidency of Migration Management, “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: ‘Muhacirlerin Gönüllü Geri Dönüş Sürecini de 13 Yıllık Müstesna Ev Sahipliğimize Yaraşır Şekilde Yöneteceğiz’” [President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: ‘We will manage the voluntary repatriation process of the Muhajirs in a manner worthy of our 13 years of exceptional hospitality’], Press release (Ankara, 10 December 2024), <https://www.goc.gov.tr/cumhurbaskani-recep-tayyip-erdogan-muhacirlerin-gonullu-geri-donus-surecini-de-13-yillik-mustesna-ev-sahipligimize-yarasir-sekilde-yonetecegiz> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Presidency of Migration Management, *Temporary protection*, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> (accessed 03 April 2025).

The EU reports this figure as 40,000: European Commission (EC), *Resettlement and other pathways to protection* (Brussels, 12 March 2025), <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and->

Statement had envisaged an additional Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme, but this scheme remains inactive on the grounds that since March 2020 Turkey has suspended return operations from Greece back to Turkey.<sup>23</sup> These are figures that fall considerably short of the resettlement needs identified by the UNHCR. Moreover, there are no immediate signs of improvement, especially now that the new US administration under Donald Trump has suspended America's resettlement programme.<sup>24</sup>

Turkey's national legislation and emphasis on the temporary residence of refugees prejudices against local integration in the form of naturalisation, as is recommended by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Turkey, this path is severely restricted because Turkey accepted the 1951 Convention with a geographical limitation expressed in Article 1 B (1) (b) as 'events occurring in Europe or elsewhere before 01 January 1951'.<sup>26</sup> In effect, this has meant that Turkey grants full refugee status only to asylum seekers fleeing from events in *Europe*. This limitation is reflected in Turkey's Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) from 2013, which limits the coverage to "Europe", defined as member countries of the Council of Europe or determined by the President of Turkey.<sup>27</sup> Eligible asylum seekers coming from outside Europe according to the LFIP are granted "conditional refugee" status until their resettlement to a third country or return to their country of origin.

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[asylum/legal-migration-and-resettlement/resettlement-and-other-pathways-protection\\_en](#) (accessed 03 April 2025).

For the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme, see European Council (EC), "EU-Turkey Statement", Press release (Brussels, 18 March 2016), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>23</sup> EU Monitor, *Seventh Annual Report of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey*, COM(2023) 543, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council (Brussels, 22 September 2023): 3-4, [https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvhdsc8bljza\\_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vm6pkol0dvxg](https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvhdsc8bljza_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vm6pkol0dvxg) (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>24</sup> The White House, "Realigning the United States refugee admissions program", Press release (Washington, D.C., 20 January 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/realigning-the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program/> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>25</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (Geneva 28 July 1951) <https://www.onlinelibrary.ihl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/1951CO1.pdf> (accessed 03 April 2025); Article 34 of the Convention says: "Contracting States should make it as easy as possible for refugees to assimilate and become naturalized".

<sup>26</sup> UN General Assembly, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees", *United Nations Treaty Series* vol. 189 (New York, 28 July 1951): 137; The other countries were Colombia, France, and Italy. For the declaration made by the Turkish representative, *ibid*: 196.

<sup>27</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, *Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu [Foreigners and International Protection Law]*, Resmi Gazete No. 6458 (Ankara, 04 April 2013), <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=6458&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5> (accessed 03 April 2025), Article 3-b.

An unofficial English version of the law can be found here: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Türkiye: Law No. 6458 of 2013, Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (Geneva, 29 October 2016) <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2016/en/114283> (accessed 03 April 2025).

The Law in Article 42 (2) effectively blocks the path to naturalisation for all types of refugees by denying them access to long-term residence permits.

Furthermore, the Citizenship Law of Turkey requires applicants to have had uninterrupted legal residence of at least five years and show an intent to settle in Turkey. This requirement is waived only for naturalisation through marriage, with conditions, or through exceptions granted by the government.<sup>28</sup> Acquisition of Turkish citizenship is associated with a long-standing legal practice of restricting immigration into Turkey to people of “Turkish descent and culture”.<sup>29</sup> Hence, when Erdoğan somewhat unexpectedly announced in 2016 that the government was considering opening the way for Syrians to acquire citizenship, it came as a break from this practice and provoked a very strong public reaction.<sup>30</sup> Overwhelmingly, the public objected to Syrian refugees being granted citizenship. The Syrians Barometer survey reports have shown since 2017 that on average more than 74 per cent of respondents have supported the following statement: “none of them should be given citizenship”.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, according to Turkey’s Minister of the Interior, as of late November 2023, there were about 238,000 Syrians who were granted Turkish citizenship.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, *Türk Vatandaşlığı Kanunu [Turkish Citizenship Law]*, Resmi Gazete No.5901 (Ankara, 2009), <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2009/06/20090612-1.htm> (accessed 03 April 2025);

Articles 11 and 12. Article 16 (2) of the 2010 Regulation on the Implementation of the Law on Turkish Citizenship mentions a category of person including asylum seekers who cannot apply for naturalization even if they may be present in the country legally: Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, *Türk Vatandaşlığı Kanununun Uygulanmasına İlişkin Yönetmelik [Regulation on the Implementation of the Turkish Nationality Law]* (Ankara, 2010), <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/21.5.2010139.pdf> (accessed 03 April 2025);

Similarly, Article 25 of the regulation granting temporary protection to Syrian refugees mentions how their years in Turkey cannot count towards long-term residence, Presidency of the Republic of Turkey 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Kemal Kirişçi and Ayselin Yıldız, “Turkey’s Migration Management Regimes”, in *A Companion to Modern Turkey’s Centennial*, ed. Alpaslan Özerdem and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (TCCB), 2016;

For protests, Selin Girit, “Turks hit back at Erdoğan plan to give Syrians citizenship”, *BBC* (online), 05 July 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36704791> (03 April 2025);

Umut Uras, “Erdogan plan to make Syrians citizens sparks online war”, *Al Jazeera* (online), 03 July 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/7/3/erdogan-plan-to-make-syrians-citizens-sparks-online-war> (03 April 2025).

<sup>31</sup> Calculated from Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2023: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye* (Ankara: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], August 2024): 141, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/media/syrians-barometer-2023-english> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>32</sup> Remarks by the Interior Minister in Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM) Plan ve Bütçe Komisyonu, 2023: 154.

The exact figure is 237,995. The most up-to-date figure is 238,768 from an announcement from the Ministry of the Interior from August 2024 to falsify claims in the public that 2.5 million Syrians have acquired citizenship, reported on X: Etkili Haber (@etkilihaberr), “Vatandaşlık verilen Suriyeli sayısı 238.768 olarak açıklandı.” [The number of Syrians granted citizenship was announced as 238,768.], X, 21 August 2024, <https://x.com/etkilihaber/status/1826213556427087896> (accessed 03 September 2024).

## 3.2

# EU's Support and FRIT

Support from the international community – especially the EU – has been critical to managing the presence of the refugees in Turkey. The international community engages with many local, national and international stakeholders in coordination with the Turkish government via the Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (3RP), which is led by the UNHCR to support a wide range of programmes and projects for refugees in Turkey.<sup>33</sup> The EU has been a leading donor of the 3RP in Turkey, especially through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT),<sup>34</sup> which emerged from the EU-Turkey Statement.<sup>35</sup> The Statement provided a framework to assist Turkey in managing the reception of the Syrian refugees for an initial five years, and prevent irregular arrivals in Europe. Since 2021, the EU has continued to provide funding for it, especially to mitigate the effects of the COVID pandemic and the 2023 earthquake in south-east Turkey. As of 2024, the EU has donated “close to EUR 10 billion” for refugees and host communities in Turkey since 2011.<sup>36</sup>

Two critical flagship programmes of this EU engagement are the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN)<sup>37</sup> and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE). They provide cash payments to more than 1.5 million refugees to support their basic household needs, and to families who send their children to school rather than into

<sup>33</sup> Regional, Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP), *Regional Strategic Overview 2024: Advanced Version* (Geneva/ New York/Amman, 05 March 2024), [https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2024RSO\\_advanced\\_version.pdf](https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2024RSO_advanced_version.pdf) (accessed 03 April 2025). For Turkey more specifically: Regional, Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP), *Türkiye Country Chapter 2023-2025*, (Geneva/ New York/Amman: Operational Data Portal (ODP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 16 March 2023), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/99579> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>34</sup> Funding from the international community to support refugees in Turkey can be tracked from United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Financial Tracking Service (FTS), *Türkiye 2024*, <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/229/summary/2024> (accessed 03 April 2025); European Commission (EC), *The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey* (Brussels, December 2023), [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3967c96e-e3c5-47fc-8ca0-88141d3d0594\\_en?filename=frit\\_factsheet.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3967c96e-e3c5-47fc-8ca0-88141d3d0594_en?filename=frit_factsheet.pdf) (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>35</sup> European Council (EC), 2016.

<sup>36</sup> EU Monitor, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> This programme was implemented from its start in September 2016 until July 2023 by the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and International Federation of Red Cross Societies (IFRC) funded through DG ECHO of the European Commission. The programme since was renamed Social Safety Net (SSN) and has been funded by DG NEAR and implemented by the Turkish Red Crescent and the Directorate General of Social Assistance of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MoFSP) of Turkey, European External Action Service (EEAS) – Delegation to Türkiye, “IFRC Concludes Implementation of the ESSN Programme in Türkiye”, Press release (Ankara, 06 December 2023), [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/turkiye/ifrc-concludes-implementation-essn-programme-turkiye\\_en?s=230](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/turkiye/ifrc-concludes-implementation-essn-programme-turkiye_en?s=230) (accessed 03 April 2025). For a resume of activities: Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), *Issue 36: 1-31 July 2023*, July 2023, [https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/2023-07\\_ESSNMonthlyReport.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/2023-07_ESSNMonthlyReport.pdf) (accessed 03 April 2025).

child labour.<sup>38</sup> However, as the presence of the Syrian refugees in Turkey has become protracted, growing effort has been put into improving their self-reliance by funding projects that give them greater access to livelihood opportunities.<sup>39</sup> The goal is to reduce the refugees' reliance on the ESSN and its costs for the EU.

In this regard, an important milestone was the Turkish government's adoption of the "Exit Strategy From The ESSN Program" in 2018. The policy document recognised the need to "implement more development-oriented assistance programmes rather than humanitarian assistance", and goes on to advocate for "a graduation strategy [that] is considered vital for enhancing the skills and competences of the SuTP [Syrian under Temporary Protection], and making them less dependent on the social assistance."<sup>40</sup> The aim of this strategy was also to draw refugees away from precarious informal employment towards more sustainable, formal employment options. This coincided with the government's decision in January 2016 to open the (formal) Turkish labour market to Syrian refugees and enable them to apply for work permits.<sup>41</sup>

These livelihood programmes have focused on improving life skills, the provision of language and vocational training for refugees to enhance their employability as well as the provision of tax subsidies to employers. Moreover, they have been accompanied by numerous other projects to foster self-employment and the creation of jobs through refugee-owned small businesses.<sup>42</sup> The need for these programmes increased dramatically as Turkey began to face serious economic challenges such as an exceptionally high inflation rate, provoking a sharp erosion of living standards across

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<sup>38</sup> For details EU Monitor, 2023.

<sup>39</sup> European Commission (EC), *Facility for Refugees in Turkey: Updated Strategic Concept Note* (Brussels, 05 June 2018), [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/updated\\_facility\\_strategic\\_concept\\_note.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/updated_facility_strategic_concept_note.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025). The note calls for programmes that would support a "progressive shift from humanitarian to development assistance, with a focus on providing sustainable socio-economic support and livelihood opportunities within Turkey". For an assessment of these projects, see EU Monitor, 2023; or European Court of Auditors (ECA), Figure 2 – Split in humanitarian aid and development aid per tranche (committed amounts as at December 2023), in *Special report 06/2024: The Facility for Refugees in Turkey – Beneficial for refugees and host communities, but impact and sustainability not yet ensured* (Luxembourg, 24 April 2024): 8, <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-06> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>40</sup> Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security, *Exit Strategy from the ESSN Program* (Ankara, 2018): 4–5, <https://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/3725/essn-exit-strategy-1.pdf> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>41</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Turkey: Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection* (Ankara, 11 January 2016), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/2016/en/113667> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Sustainable employment and reviving small businesses gained even more emphasis under the post-earthquake circumstances, Operational Data Portal (ODP), *Türkiye: From Aid to Self-Reliance Revisiting & Reviving Discussions on Transition to Livelihoods* (Ankara: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 11 June 2024), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/109257> (accessed 06 April 2025); Regional, Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP), 2023; For a breakdown of these programmes, projects and their beneficiaries, see Operational Data Portal (ODP), *Türkiye Inter-sector Dataset* (Ankara: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], January 2024) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/38?sv=4&geo=113> (accessed 06 April 2025).

the country.<sup>43</sup> The COVID pandemic and the earthquake in February 2023 that hit the precise regions of the country in which almost half of the refugees live have further aggravated this adverse economic picture.<sup>44</sup> As a result, according to one expert assessment, a “staggering 91% of refugee households cannot cover their monthly expenses fully”, together with reports of increases in child labour, child begging and child marriages, which are typical survival strategies, as well as the prospect that “many will likely be facing a food crisis.”<sup>45</sup>

The post-earthquake context thus calls for reinforcing efforts to improve livelihood opportunities for refugees.<sup>46</sup> However, all 3RP stakeholders, including the Turkish government and the EU, face a major challenge here: so far, all the above efforts have fallen considerably short of generating significant sustainable formal employment for Syrian refugees in Turkey. Instead, an estimated one million individuals – including children – work informally, alongside almost a third of the country’s own workforce.<sup>47</sup>

According to the UNHCR, the 2021–22 livelihood projects only put about “20,000 individuals into employment through job placement and job creation activities”.<sup>48</sup> An earlier 3RP Monitoring Report highlighted that over 11,000 Syrian refugees and

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<sup>43</sup> Birsen Altayli, “Dark days for Turks as Erdoğan atones for economic errors”, *Reuters* (online), 18 July 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/dark-days-turks-erdogan-atones-economic-errors-2024-07-18/> (accessed 03 April 2025);  
Natasha Turak, “Turkey’s inflation passes 75% in what economists believe is peak”, *CNBC* (online), 03 June 2024, <http://bit.ly/3FOSq9v> (03 April 2025).  
A recent poll found half of Turkey could “barely” make ends meet while 30% fared worse still, quoted in Birsen Altayli, “Turkey faces dark days as Erdoğan tries to atone for economic errors”, *Duvar* (online), 18 July 2024, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkey-faces-dark-days-as-erdogan-tries-to-atone-for-economic-errors-news-64685>, (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>44</sup> Liz Alderman, “Turkey’s Reeling Economy Is an Added Challenge for Erdogan”, *New York Times* (online), 19 February 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/business/turkey-earthquake-economy-erdogan.html> (accessed 03 April 2025);  
Mohammad Tahir, *Shaken to The Core: The Plight of Syrian Refugees After February’s Earthquake* (Washington, D.C.: The Wilson Center, 11 April 2023), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/shaken-core-plight-syrian-refugees-after-februarys-earthquake> (accessed 03 April 2026).

<sup>45</sup> Operational Data Portal (ODP), 2024.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Accurate figures are difficult to obtain but “over one million” is commonly mentioned, for example, in Murat Erdoğan, 2024: 178;  
Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Government of Denmark (eds.), *Syrian Refugees’ Perceptions of the (formal) Labour Market in Southeast Turkey* (Copenhagen, 09 August 2021), <https://bit.ly/45s9FYI> (accessed 06 April 2025);  
A frequently cited study supported by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and based on statistics from 2017 estimates that more than 940,000 Syrians, including children, worked overwhelmingly informally;  
Luis Pinedo Caro, “Syrian refugees in the Turkish Labour Market”, *Sosyoekonomi* 28 (46), 51–74: 12;  
According to the Turkish Social Security Agency, overall informal employment stood at 29 per cent in 2021 but was much higher in provinces where most refugees live, ranging from 33.83 per cent in Gaziantep to 37.93 per cent in Hatay and 44.31% in Sanliurfa, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu (SGK) [Turkish Republic Social Security Agency], *Kayıtdışı İstihdam Oranı [Informal Employment Ration]*, <https://www.sgk.gov.tr/Content/Post/e3f8021f-6c7e-49a7-a51a-51d79a187ada/Genel-Bilgi-2025-02-11-02-11-14> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Regional, Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP), 2023: 67.

Turkish citizens gained access to economic opportunities in 2019 and celebrated that “this is double the achievement of 2018”.<sup>49</sup> In 2021, the record did not improve, standing at “10,099 refugees or host community members” who “were able to gain or increase their income through job placement and income opportunities, reaching almost 50 percent of its target [...]”.<sup>50</sup> A 2022 study by the UNDP notes how these livelihood programmes are delivering results that are “not at scale”, and estimates that from 2017 to 2024 such projects will have created at best 66,000 jobs.<sup>51</sup> There is no information on the sustainability levels of these newly created jobs. Furthermore, this performance falls considerably short of the 180,000 formal jobs that the above-mentioned study by the Turkish government from 2018 had estimated were needed for Turkey’s Syrian refugees.<sup>52</sup> The study had also mentioned that it was essential for an equal number of Turkish citizens to benefit from such job opportunities as a way of supporting social cohesion.

### 3.3

## Livelihood Programmes Fall Short of Sustainable Job Creation

This poor performance has been criticised by the EU’s Court of Auditors, on the grounds that “providing training does not generate value for money if the vast majority of participants subsequently remain unemployed”.<sup>53</sup> This dilemma of putting emphasis on trainings to improve “employability” versus access to actual sustainable jobs was also highlighted in a 2023 study on the beneficiaries of ESSN support.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, the pressure to prioritise projects and policies that focus on refugees’ self-reliance and their access to sustainable livelihood opportunities persists. There is a need for creating proper (i.e., formal) jobs that the refugees can access effectively. In this context, it is important to remember that “firms are not charities”, and that it is

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<sup>49</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *2019 Monitoring Report 3RP Turkey Chapter 2019* (Ankara, 15 September 2020): 49, <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/2019-monitoring-report-3rp-turkey-chapter-2019> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>50</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *3RP Turkey Chapter 2021: Outcome Monitoring Report* (Ankara, 27 September 2022): 68, <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/3rp-turkey-chapter-2021-outcome-monitoring-report> (accessed 06 April 2025).  
The original target was 20,365, *ibid*: 74.

<sup>51</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Feasibility Study for Türkiye Compact, Stimulating Economic Growth and Employment of Refugees and Host Communities in Türkiye through International Preferential Trade* (Ankara, 2022): 18, [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp\\_feasibility\\_study\\_for\\_turkiye\\_compact.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp_feasibility_study_for_turkiye_compact.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>52</sup> Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2018: 14.

<sup>53</sup> European Court of Auditors (ECA), 2024: 40.

<sup>54</sup> International Red Cross, Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS), *ESSN Livelihoods Pathways Study, Final Report* (Ankara, April 2023), [https://platform.kizilaykart.org/en/Doc/rapor/ESSN\\_Livelihoods\\_Pathways\\_Study.pdf](https://platform.kizilaykart.org/en/Doc/rapor/ESSN_Livelihoods_Pathways_Study.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025).

unrealistic to expect them to act based on purely philanthropic motivations.<sup>55</sup> Their engagement with Syrian refugees will need to be economically incentivised. All in all, this points at the need to shift the focus to the demand side of Turkey's labour market by creating circumstances that lead to greater commercial interest in the formal employment of refugees.

The UNDP's proposal for a "Türkiye Compact", with its emphasis on generating demand for Syrian labour through the granting of favourable access to the markets of the EU, US and Canada for Turkish exports that involve Syrian labour, offers a concrete path to enable such a shift. This is especially pertinent now that the euphoria among Syrians and Turkish citizens about the return of the refugees to Syria following the overthrow of the Assad regime has been stalled by realities on the ground.<sup>56</sup> Physical destruction of the towns from where refugees come as well as lack of housing, lack of infrastructure, lack of public services and most importantly lack of employment engender these realities. It is doubtful whether this picture is likely to change precipitously with the arrival of a new regime in Syria. Hence, the Turkish government has replaced its initial policy of encouraging returns with one that allows refugees to visit the places they come from and judge for themselves the conditions back in Syria and then return to Turkey without losing their temporary protections status.<sup>57</sup> This policy aligns with the position of the UNHCR, which does not consider the current situation in Syria conducive to "voluntary returns", and argues that refugees should not have their status revoked on the basis of regime change alone.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (London: Penguin Books, 2017): 175.

<sup>56</sup> Reva Dhingra and Lama Mourad, "Don't Rush to Send Syrians Back", *Foreign Policy* (online), 15 January 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/01/15/syria-refugees-return-assad-security-asylum-europe-lebanon-turkey-jordan/> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>57</sup> "Hakan Fidan: Suriyeliler artık ülkelerine dönebilir" [Hakan Fidan: The Syrians can return home by now], *10 Haber* (online), 08 December 2024, <https://10haber.net/gundem/hakan-fidan-suriyeliler-artik-ulkelerine-donebilir-568850/> (accessed 06 April 2025);

"Bakan Yerlikaya'dan Suriyelilerle ilgili açıklama: Dönüşler iki kat arttı" [Declaration about the Syrians by Minister Yerlikaya: Returns have doubled], *Oksijen* (online), 10 December 2024, <https://gazeteoksijen.com/turkiye/bakan-yerlikayadan-suriyelilerle-ilgili-aciklama-donusler-iki-kat-artti-230084> (accessed 06 April 2025);

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Regional Flash Update #7: Syria situation crisis* (Geneva, 27 December 2024), <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-crisis-regional-flash-update-7> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>58</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic* (Geneva, December 2024), <https://www.refworld.org/policy/countrypos/unhcr/2024/en/149254> (accessed 06 April 2025).

4.

# The UNDP's Proposal for a "Türkiye Compact"

The United Nations Development Programme's "Türkiye Compact" proposal, which is central to this project, is a policy inspired by the Global Compact on Refugees<sup>59</sup> that was endorsed by all EU member states, except Hungary.<sup>60</sup> An econometric study by the UNDP underpinning this proposal shows that if the EU extended preferential market access to Turkish agricultural products which are not included in the EU-Turkey Customs Union, and if the United States together with Canada did the same for Turkish textiles, this would create 284,000 new formal jobs in Turkey from the resulting growth in exports.<sup>61</sup> In return, Turkish companies benefitting from this arrangement would extend formal employment to Syrian refugees.

The "Türkiye Compact" proposal thereby aims to improve refugees' economic self-reliance, foster social cohesion with receiving communities, and alleviate some of the strain on the EU's humanitarian funding. As such, the TC proposal neatly reflects the whole-of-society approach anchored in the Global Compact on Refugees, benefitting both refugees and host communities.

4.1

## Economic Inclusion and the UNDP's TC Proposal

The origins of the UNDP's proposal lie in the European migration crisis of 2015 and 2016. The crisis erupted when close to one million (mostly) Syrian refugees made their way to Europe - mostly Germany - via Turkey and other routes.<sup>62</sup> This crisis,

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<sup>59</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Compact on Refugees – Booklet* (New York, 2018), <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022.

<sup>62</sup> European Commission (EC), Directorate-General for Communication, *The EU and the Migration Crisis* (Brussels, July 2017), <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e9465e4f-b2e4-11e7-837e-01aa75ed71a1> (accessed 06 April 2025);

described as *The New Odyssey*, severely strained relations between EU member countries, and even culminated in the temporary reimposition of border controls within the EU.<sup>63</sup> The crisis also brought with it the recognition that refugee protection based on the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was “broken”.<sup>64</sup>

It is against this background that a summit at the UN in September 2016 was held to address the challenges facing the governance of migration in general and refugee movements in particular.<sup>65</sup> One of the important outcomes that emerged from this summit was a process that culminated in the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in December 2018.<sup>66</sup> It underlines the primacy of the 1951 Convention and emphasises the significance of striving for traditional durable solutions, but in recognition of the increasingly protracted nature of most refugee situations around the world, it also goes beyond the Convention. That is, the GCR calls for the need to foster the self-reliance of refugees and the resilience of their host communities by transforming refugees from a humanitarian burden into a population able to contribute to the development and economic opportunities in their host countries.

With this objective in mind, the GCR advocates for the promotion of “economic opportunities, decent work, job creation and entrepreneurship programmes for host community members and refugees” in order to assist the economic inclusion of refugees. The Compact proposes to explore the possibility of extending preferential trade arrangements to countries hosting large numbers of refugees in return for facilitating formal employment as one way in which job creation could be achieved.<sup>67</sup> This proposition aligns well with the long-accepted view that trade liberalisation policies calling for the reduction of tariffs, the expansion or even full elimination of quotas, and the resolution of regulatory obstacles enable economic growth and employment.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, a growing body of research also shows that proper employment prospects for refugees and a welcoming environment for their entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth in the host country.<sup>69</sup> This could pave

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“Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts”, *BBC News* (online), 04 March 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Kingsley, *The New Odyssey: The Story of the Twenty-First Century Refugee Crisis* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017);

Natascha Zaun and Friedrich Püttmann, 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Ferris and Katherine Donato, *Refugees, Migration and Global Governance: Negotiating the Global Compacts* (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>66</sup> United Nations (UN), “General Assembly Endorses Landmark Global Compact on Refugees, Adopting 53 Third Committee Resolutions, 6 Decisions Covering Range of Human Rights”, Press Release (New York, 17 December 2018), <https://press.un.org/en/2018/ga12107.doc.htm> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>67</sup> In particular paragraph 71 in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2018: 27.

<sup>68</sup> Romain Wacziarg and Karen Horn Welch, *Trade Liberalization and Growth: New Evidence*, Working Paper 10152 (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Homi Kharas, John W. McArthur and Izumi Ohno (eds.), *Leave No One Behind: Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, October 2019);

the way to a win-win outcome benefitting both refugees and their receiving communities.<sup>70</sup> It would also provide a formula for weaning an ever-growing number of communities in the Global South off aid dependency, and would instead support their transition along self-sustaining developmental trajectories—pursuant to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the quest to “leave no one behind.”<sup>71</sup>

So far, the EU-Jordan Compact is the only example that has adopted this approach.<sup>72</sup> In this Compact, the EU promised to provide easier market access for the products of Jordanian companies employing a minimum number of Syrian refugees, on the condition that the Jordanian government facilitate the acquisition of work permits for the refugees. However, the Compact failed to reach its targets for various reasons, such as a scarcity of companies that met the criteria, complied with EU import standards, and were active in the product sectors listed in the Compact.<sup>73</sup> The increase in Jordanian exports remained limited and many refugees continue to suffer from the lack of access to decent and sustainable work.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, as one commentator notes, the “Jordan Compact represents a noble and significant initiative” and an important “global learning opportunity.”<sup>75</sup> The UNDP’s proposal for a “Türkiye Compact” can build on this experience.

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Michael Clemens, Cindy Huang and Jimmy Graham, *The Economic and Fiscal Effects of Granting Refugees Formal Labor Market Access*, Working Paper 496 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, October 2019).

<sup>70</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Development Approaches to Migration and Displacement 2016–2018: Key Achievements, Experiences and Lessons Learned 2016–2018* (New York, 11 October 2019), <https://www.undp.org/publications/development-approaches-migration-and-displacement-2016-2018> (accessed 06 April 2025);

Maegan Hendow, *Bridging refugee protection and development: Policy Recommendations for Applying a Development-Displacement Nexus Approach* (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development [ICMPD], 31 January 2019), [https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/48447/file/Bridgingorefugeeoprotectionoandodevelopmento-oPolicyORecommendationsoforOApplyingoaoDevelopment-DisplacementoNexusoApproachOEN.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/48447/file/Bridging%20refugee%20protection%20and%20development%20-%20Policy%20Recommendations%20for%20Applying%20a%20Development-Displacement%20Nexus%20Approach%20EN.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>71</sup> United Nations (UN), *Sustainable Development Goals* (New York, 2015), <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>72</sup> European Commission (EC), *EU-Jordan Partnership: The Compact* (Brussels, March 2017), <https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/jordan-compact.pdf> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>73</sup> Cindy Huang and Kate Gough, “The Jordan Compact: Three Years on, Where Do We Stand?”, *Center for Global Development* (Blog), 11 March 2019, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/jordan-compact-three-years-on> (accessed 06 April 2025);

<sup>74</sup> Rasha Istaiteyeh, *Jordan Compact Under the Microscope: Analyzing Impacts on Refugee Labor, EU Trade, and Returnees’ Decisions* (blog), *GAPs return migration* (online), 15 April 2024, <https://www.returnmigration.eu/gapsblog/jordan-compact-under-the-microscope> (accessed 06 April 2025);  
“Jordan issues record number of work permits to Syrian refugees”, *The Jordan Times* (online), 26 January 2020, <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-issues-record-number-work-permits-syrian-refugees> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>75</sup> Rasha Istaiteyeh, 2024.

## 4.2

# The UNDP's Proposal for Turkey

The “Türkiye Compact” advocates for Canada, the EU, and the United States to extend trade preferences to Turkey to incentivise businesses in the agricultural, processed food, and textile-garment sectors to provide mandated and sustainable employment for both Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens. These sectors are not only labour-intensive, but Turkish businesses active in them enjoy a competitive edge on global markets. And yet, Turkish exports currently face customs duties and quotas when exporting to the aforementioned markets. These undermine Turkish companies’ competitiveness and thus their capacity to create additional jobs in Turkey.

The “Türkiye Compact” is based on the assumption that “many Syrian refugees will likely not return to Syria”, especially “many young Syrian refugees born or at least who spent their childhood in Türkiye may not be interested in going back to Syria”.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, there is the reality, as noted in the previous section, that the Turkish economy is not doing well and is marked by a high ratio of informal employment. The latter is particularly widespread in the south-eastern regions of the country where most refugees live, and the sectors in which they are mostly employed are agriculture and textiles.<sup>77</sup> The developments in Syria since early December will impact this picture. However, as briefly mentioned in the introduction and further elaborated below in section 4.4, at this point, it would be unrealistic to expect everyone to return to Syria in the near future.

The UNDP’s proposal is based on an econometric feasibility study that “provides an estimation of the additional export revenues that can be generated by ‘Türkiye Compact’” as well as “the economic impact of export growth in terms of employment and value-added” to the GDP of Turkey.<sup>78</sup> This assumes that trade preferences can generate powerful business incentives and benefits that “can be identified and anticipated by the private sector”.<sup>79</sup> The UNDP’s study sets out to measure the export potential of Turkey to the US, Canada, and the EU if Turkey “had the same share of the

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<sup>76</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022: 14.

<sup>77</sup> Ahmet Gulek, *Formal Effects of Informal Labor Evidence from the Syrian refugees in Turkey*, Working Paper (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] Economics, 23 February 2024) : 7, [https://economics.mit.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Formal\\_Effects\\_of\\_Informal\\_Labor\\_Paper\\_final\\_1.pdf](https://economics.mit.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Formal_Effects_of_Informal_Labor_Paper_final_1.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025); Cem Başlevent and Aysenur Acar, “Recent Trends in Informal Employment in Turkey”, *Yildiz Social Science Review* 1, no.1 (2015): 77–88; Turkish Red Crescent and World Food Programme (WFP), *Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings 2019* (Ankara, 11 July 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/refugees-turkey-livelihoods-survey-findings-2019-entr> (accessed 06 April 2025); Extensive informality is also highlighted in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022: 18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid: 7, 27.

target market as it had on average on the global market”.<sup>80</sup> It considers what the value of Turkish exports would be under three scenarios regarding textiles and garments, agricultural and agro-industrial products<sup>81</sup>:

- if current duties and quotas were maintained at the same level;
- if they were reduced by 50 per cent; and finally,
- if they were completely eliminated.

If full trade concessions were extended to Turkish products in these sectors, the UNDP estimates that Turkish exports would expand by \$7.8 billion by 2025, creating almost 284,000 new jobs in Turkey. If a quota of 20 per cent was introduced for each workplace, this number would include 57,000 Syrian refugees. An estimated additional 52,000 jobs would result from secondary production and consumption accompanied by significant increases in tax and social security revenues. All in all, the “Türkiye Compact” would, both directly and indirectly, contribute an additional 0.82 per cent to Turkey’s overall GDP.<sup>82</sup> This is notable considering that the damage caused by the earthquake was calculated to amount to approximately 2 per cent of Turkey’s GDP.<sup>83</sup>

The UNDP’s study also explores four possible pathways for extending such trade concessions without undermining the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle of the WTO, i.e. the requirement that each member should treat the imports of all other members equally.<sup>84</sup> Article 24 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) permits members to deviate from the MFN rule when they negotiate bilateral or regional trade agreements that remove barriers to trade among the participants. A second method would be based on Article 9 of the Marrakesh Agreement which allows for temporary waivers of obligations under exceptional circumstances such as humanitarian crises. In December 2017, Turkey together with Qatar sought such a waiver, but did not ultimately follow it through.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 32.

<sup>81</sup> For a list of these products based on WTO’s Harmonized System codes see Ibid: 34, 39.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid: 56.

<sup>83</sup> “Ekonomistler Kahramanmaraş depreminin mali boyutunu yorumladı” [Economists commented on the financial dimension of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake], *Cumhuriyet* (online), 10 February 2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/gundemdeprem-bolgesinin-ekonomik-gostergeleri-2050493> (accessed 06 April 2025); Orhan Coskun and Nevzat Devranoglu, “Earthquakes to disrupt Turkey’s growth, stretch budget as Erdogan heads to elections”, *Reuters* (online), 08 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/earthquakes-disrupt-turkeys-growth-stretch-budget-erdogan-heads-elections-2023-02-08/> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>84</sup> World Trade Organization (WTO), *Principles of the Trading System*, [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/fact2\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact2_e.htm) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>85</sup> World Trade Organization (WTO), *Cooperation for Providing Employment for Displaced Syrians: Communication from Qatar and Turkey*, WT/MIN(17)/10/Rev.1 (Geneva, 10 December 2017), <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/MIN17/10R1.pdf&Open=True> (accessed 06 April 2025).

For a discussion of the initiative, Başak Kale, “Developing EU Trade Incentives: A Support Tool for Refugee Self-Reliance and Host Community Resilience in Turkey”, *EuroMeSCo Paper*, No. 51

Another path suggested is the WTO’s “Enabling Clause” that allows developed countries to accord preferential treatment to imports from developing countries under the General System of Preferences (GSP). Currently, both the EU and the United States are in the process of reassessing and revising their respective GSPs.<sup>86</sup> However, in 2019, the Trump Administration removed Turkey from the list of beneficiaries of the US GSP “due to the country’s increased level of economic development”.<sup>87</sup> Finally, regarding the EU, the UNDP suggests exploring the “Everything But Arms” (EBA) option envisaged for low and middle income countries to extend their GSP to cover countries which host large number of refugees and are willing to adopt policies supporting their inclusion.<sup>88</sup>

Beyond these possible pathways to an adoption of the TC, the following may be the most practical and feasible.

### 4.3

## A WTO-Compatible Pathway for the Adoption of the TC

The most viable approach that would be WTO-compatible for adopting the TC in the specific context of EU-Turkey relations would be to rely on existing bilateral or regional trade agreements that remove barriers to trade among the participants.

Trade between the EU and Turkey is primarily governed through a customs union: a bilateral arrangement that falls under Article 24 of GATT, adopted in 1995.<sup>89</sup> It reciprocally removes all tariffs and quotas on industrial goods, thus making Turkey

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(Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean [IEMed], 2022), [https://www.euromesco.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Paper-Nº51\\_Basak-Kale.pdf](https://www.euromesco.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Paper-Nº51_Basak-Kale.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>86</sup> European Commission (EC), *Generalised Scheme of Preferences*, [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/generalised-scheme-preferences\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/generalised-scheme-preferences_en) (accessed 06 April 2025);

Congressional Research Service, *Generalized System of Preferences (GSP): Overview and Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C., 22 November 2023), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL33663.pdf> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>87</sup> Congressional Research Service (CRS), *Trump Administration’s Proposed Removal of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) Benefits for India and Turkey*, CRS Report RL33663 (Washington, D.C., 15 March 2019), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN11075#:~:text=On%20March%202024%2C%202019%2C%20President,from%20designated%20beneficiary%20developing%20countries%20> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>88</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022: 29–30.

<sup>89</sup> EUR-Lex, Decision No 1/95 of the EC-Turkey Association Council of 22 December 1995 on implementing the final phase of the Customs Union, *Official Journal the European Communities* L 35/1 (Brussels, 13 February 1996), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:21996D0213\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:21996D0213(01)) (accessed 06 April 2025).

part of the EU's internal market within this sector and hence bound by the EU's Common Commercial Policy.

The customs union was originally conceptualised as a step in Turkey's accession to the EU. However, the accession negotiations were suspended in 2018 in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt and rising authoritarianism in Turkey, as well as deteriorating relations between Turkey and the EU more generally. Similarly, the European Council also declared in 2018 that “no further work towards the modernisation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union is foreseen”.<sup>90</sup> The idea of a modernisation of the customs union had been agreed in 2015 to pave the way, *inter alia*, for the full liberalisation of trade in agricultural products, too.<sup>91</sup>

Currently, trade in agricultural products is managed by a separate agreement, also under the purview of Article 24, which was adopted in 1998 and then further expanded in 2006 and 2007.<sup>92</sup> The agreement provides preferential concessions for certain Turkish agricultural and fishery exports to the EU while regulating the taxation of the agricultural component of processed food products.<sup>93</sup> EU imports of Turkish food and drinks stood at only €5.6 and €6.6 billion out of an overall €98.5 and €95.5 billion of imports in 2022 and 2023 respectively.<sup>94</sup> The share of agricultural products in Turkish exports to the EU has been steadily falling from 15.4 to 7 per cent between 1995 and

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<sup>90</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process*, ST 10555/18 (Brussels, 26 June 2018): 13, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>91</sup> European Commission (EC), *Daily News 12 / 05 / 2015*, MEX/15/4967, 12 May 2015, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/mex\\_15\\_4967](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/mex_15_4967) (accessed 06 April 2025); European Commission, “Commission proposes to Modernize the Customs Union with Turkey”, Press release (Brussels, 02 December 2016), [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_16\\_4468](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_16_4468) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>92</sup> EUR-Lex, Decision No 1/98 of the EC-Turkey Association Council of 25 February 1998, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 86/1, (20 March 1998), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:1998:086:FULL> (accessed 06 April 2025); Subsequently amended and expanded: EUR-Lex, Decision No 2/2006 of the EC-Turkey Association Council of 17 October 2006, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 367/68 (22 December 2006), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22006D0999&from=EN> (accessed 06 April 2025); EUR-Lex, Decision No 1/2007 of the EC-Turkey Association Council of 25 June 2007, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 202/50 (31 July 2008), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22008D0625> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>93</sup> The listing of the taxable part of processed food products such as pasta, tomato sauce, confectionary, dairy products etc. is available in the annexes section of *Decision No 1/95*, EU-Turkey Association Council, 1996.

<sup>94</sup> European Commission (EC), Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, *Agri-Food Trade Statistical Factsheet European Union – Türkiye*, [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/agrifood-turkiye\\_en.pdf](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/agrifood-turkiye_en.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025): 6, table “Evolution of 15 Top EU Agri-Food Imports from Türkiye, 2019 – 2023”; European Commission (EC), Directorate-General for Trade and Economic Security, *Türkiye: EU trade relations with Türkiye. Facts, figures and latest developments*, [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/turkiye\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/turkiye_en) (accessed 06 April 2025), table “Trade in goods, EUR billion”.

2021.<sup>95</sup> These contrasts suggest ample room for growth in Turkish agri-food exports to the EU which are not currently included in the Customs Union. This is also highlighted in the UNDP's study underlying the "Türkiye Compact".

A host of factors – ranging from the results of the national and local elections in Turkey, the abandonment of unorthodox economic policies, and the replacement of a populist foreign policy with a more pragmatic one as well as various global-level geopolitical and micro-level supply chain-related issues – are currently creating a more positive landscape in EU-Turkish relations.<sup>96</sup> This positive climate has culminated in the decision to restart high-level dialogues on a range of policy issues, and to resume meetings of the EC-Turkey Association Council – the body critical to decisions relating to the Customs Union but also the ones concerning trade in agriculture.<sup>97</sup> After a long hiatus, a high-level dialogue on trade took place in July 2024, primarily focusing on the modernisation of the Customs Union.<sup>98</sup> However, so far, both sides are far from being anywhere near starting negotiations to arrive at such a goal. Even if such a decision was to be taken, concluding the negotiations is expected to take many years (at least five, officials tell us) and has the risk of being inconclusive due to a range of complex problems and challenges.<sup>99</sup> One of these challenges results from the fact that studies show that full liberalisation of trade in agricultural products would benefit consumers in Turkey in terms of lower prices and better-quality products, while Turkish producers, without the benefits of subsidies that are available to EU farmers, would encounter severe difficulties.<sup>100</sup> The latter outcome is likely to make it very difficult for the Turkish government to support the inclusion of agricultural products in an upgraded Customs Union.

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<sup>95</sup> Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Trade, *Turkiye and the EU*, <https://bit.ly/3ToGxKn> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>96</sup> Kadri Tastan, *EU-Turkey Economic Relations in the Era of Geo-economic Fragmentation*, SWP Comment 2024/C40 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], September 2024), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024C40/> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>97</sup> European Commission (EC), *Joint Communication to European Council: State of Play of EU-Türkiye Political, Economic and Trade Relations*, JOIN(2023) 50 final (Brussels, 29 November 2023), <https://bit.ly/4k2zm50> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>98</sup> European Commission (EC), "Joint Statement by Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis and Minister of Trade Bolat at the EU-Türkiye High-Level Dialogue on Trade", Press release (Brussels, 08 July 2024), [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/cs/statement\\_24\\_3684](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/cs/statement_24_3684) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>99</sup> There is a vast literature examining these challenges. For a brief and succinct discussion Adam Michalski, *Turkey and the European Union: in a maze of disputes*, OSW Commentary 586 (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern European Studies [OSW], 03 April 2024), <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-04-03/turkey-and-european-union-a-maze-disputes> (accessed 06 April 2025). For a discussion from a Turkish perspective Ahmet Emre Usta, *Modernizing the EU-Turkey Customs Union*, IKV Brief 68 (Istanbul: Economic Development Foundation [IKV], April 2022), [https://www.ikv.org.tr/images/files/Modernizing\\_the\\_EU\\_Turkey\\_Customs\\_Union.pdf](https://www.ikv.org.tr/images/files/Modernizing_the_EU_Turkey_Customs_Union.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>100</sup> Rasim Canatan (ed.), *Türkiye ve Avrupa Birliği Arasındaki Gümrük Birliği'nin Güncellenmesi: Tarım, Hizmetler ve Anlaşmazlıkların Halli [Updating the Customs Union between Türkiye and the European Union: Agriculture, Services and Dispute Resolution]* (Ankara: European Union and Global Research Association [ABKAD] 2020): 23.

It is precisely this uncertainty and these complications surrounding the modernisation of the Customs Union that render the TC potentially impactful in terms of job creation both for refugees as well as members of their host communities. At the same time, this new positive climate in EU-Turkish relations offers an institutional and political opportunity for the EU to adopt the UNDP's TC proposal under the existing framework governing trade in agricultural goods between the two parties.

For the EU, this would be neither an unusual nor an unprecedented policy. Using trade to pursue migration policy is already part of the EU's existing acquis and broader policy thinking. In a communication from 2016, which proposed "a new partnership framework" for the EU's migration agenda with third countries, the European Commission advocated using trade policy as a tool.<sup>101</sup> The notion of preferential trade arrangements is considered a method to encourage third-country cooperation to manage migration.<sup>102</sup> More specifically, in this proposal, the Commission refers to its Compact with Jordan as an example of trade policy being employed to alleviate the plight of refugees and help host communities deal with their reception.<sup>103</sup> The Commission brought similar ideas to the fore in its Communication to the Council and the EP on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum by flagging trade policy as a tool to maximise the "impact of international partnerships" and in "addressing root causes of irregular migration".<sup>104</sup>

These communications reflect a policy discussion that increasingly advocates for greater coherence between migration and development policies, as well as a broader recognition of the need in protracted refugee situations to move from pure humanitarian assistance programmes to developmental ones – an approach that is at the very core of the TC. Furthermore, the idea of engaging trade policy has been broached in a needs assessment report prepared for the EU's FRIT in 2018. The report elaborates a long list of "priority actions" under six main sector headings that include livelihood. Here, the idea that the "international community should assist in efforts to access export markets, such as ... providing preferential export and trading status to specific products" is listed.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> EUR-Lex, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Investment Bank on establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, COM (2016) 385 final", Press release (Brussels, 07 June 2016): 9, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0385> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid: 17.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid: 13.

<sup>104</sup> EUR-Lex, *Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, European Commission, COM(2020) 609 final (Brussels, 23 September 2020), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0609> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>105</sup> European Commission (EC), *Technical Assistance to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (2017/393359/1)*, Final Report (Brussels, 31 October 2018): 85, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/updated\\_needs\\_assessment.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/updated_needs_assessment.pdf) (accessed 06 April 2025).

Finally, there are the cases of Pakistan and Ukraine, where trade has been used as an EU policy to address humanitarian crisis situations and to support local economic development under exceptional circumstances. In response to devastating monsoon floods in 2010, the EU in 2012 introduced “emergency autonomous trade preferences” enabling Pakistan to export a list of products – primarily textiles – free of tariffs until the end of 2013.<sup>106</sup> In the absence of a prior free trade agreement between the EU and Pakistan, the EU sought and received a temporary waiver from its WTO MFN obligations.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in the midst of a major displacement crisis and difficult economic circumstances, the EU granted Ukraine “concessions in the form of trade-liberalisation measures for all products”.<sup>108</sup> In this case, prior authorisation from the WTO was not required as the decision was connected to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the two sides, signed in 2017 but still in its transitional period. This autonomous trade measure brought forward full preferential access to the EU’s internal market for Ukrainian products, including agricultural ones, and was renewed by the EU in May 2024.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the EU is equipped with a “soft acquis” that could support the adoption of the “Türkiye Compact”.

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<sup>106</sup> EUR-Lex, Emergency autonomous trade preferences for Pakistan \*\*\*I, European Parliament legislative resolution of 13 September 2012 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council introducing emergency autonomous trade preferences for Pakistan (COM(2010)0552 – C7-0322/2010 – 2010/0289(COD)) P7\_TC1-COD(2010)0289, Position of the European Parliament adopted at first reading on 13 September 2012 with a view to the adoption of Regulation (EU) No .../2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council introducing emergency autonomous trade preferences for Pakistan, *Official Journal of the European Union*, CE 353/323 (03 December 2013), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52012AP0350> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>107</sup> For the waiver procedure at the WTO: World Trade Organization (WTO), *Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization*, Article IX-3 (Marrakesh, 15 April 1994): 7, [https://www.wto.org/english/docs\\_e/legal\\_e/marag\\_e.htm#articleIX](https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/marag_e.htm#articleIX) (accessed 06 April 2025); World Trade Organization (WTO), *Members approve EU waiver request for trade aid to Pakistan*, 01 February 2012, [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/news12\\_e/good\\_02feb12\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news12_e/good_02feb12_e.htm) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>108</sup> EUR-Lex, Regulation (EU) 2022/870 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2022 on temporary trade-liberalisation measures supplementing trade concessions applicable to Ukrainian products under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 152/103 (30 May 2022), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/870> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>109</sup> EUR-Lex, Regulation (EU) 2024/1392 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on temporary trade-liberalisation measures supplementing trade concessions applicable to Ukrainian products under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L series (29 May 2024), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1392> (accessed 06 April 2025).

## 4.4

# The TC and the Collapse of the Assad Regime in Syria

Right at the end of our study, the political situation in Syria radically changed. Early in December 2024, the Islamist insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) that had been ruling the Idlib province in northwestern Syria launched an offensive against the Assad regime and somewhat unexpectedly captured Damascus. This lightning victory fuelled a sense of jubilation among refugees in Turkey and their host communities. The media was saturated with images of refugees making their way to border crossings between Turkey and Syria. These images, alongside declarations by Turkish government officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that Turkey's Syrian refugees could now return to their homes, seemed to render the UNDP's TC obsolete.

However, within a very short period, it began to dawn on the refugees as well as Turkey and the international community that return did not appear to be viable in the immediate future. The UNHCR declared that a change of government on its own did not mean that the situation in Syria was now open to returns. Many obstacles blocking return remains. Foremost, most cities and towns from which the refugees came, are in ruins, and the country's infrastructure - from roads to schools and hospitals - is destroyed. For all intent and purposes, Syria is devoid of an economy and 90 per cent of its population live below the poverty line.<sup>110</sup> Its economy shrunk from \$67,5 to a mere \$9 billion from 2011 to 2023. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the new regime will succeed in forming an inclusive government and manage to establish a form of governance that is acceptable to Syria's diverse ethnic, religious, and social composition. Unless the new regime in Damascus enjoys domestic and international legitimacy, it is unclear whether the necessary funds estimated at \$400 billion will be raised for reconstruction. As a result, it is not surprising that the enthusiasm for returning to Syria among Syrians in Turkey has faded for now and that both the Turkish government and the wider public may have resigned to this reality.

The EU seems to share this view. As Kaja Kallas, the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, declared during her visit to Ankara on 24 January 2025: "The path to Syria's future also runs through Türkiye. I commend Türkiye for really helping a large number of Syrian refugees and welcoming them here. It is clear

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<sup>110</sup> Before the conflict, only roughly a third was under the poverty line. World Food Program (WFP), *What's Happening in Syria? How the Civil War Is Worsening Hunger Among Civilians* (Washington, D.C., 12 December 2024), <https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/whats-happening-syria-civil-war-worsening-hunger-among-civilians/> (accessed 06 April 2025).

that the refugees can return to Syria when Syria is a stable country, and there are jobs, and it is possible to make a living.”<sup>111</sup>

It is against this background that the relevance of the TC persists. It can become repurposed as a transitional arrangement that would equip the refugees with the resources that would enable them to rebuild their livelihoods in Syria if a stable and inclusive order emerges. This could help create a more sustainable return environment with the added benefit of contributing to the revitalisation of local economies through the resources, as modest as they may be, that refugees bring. Moreover, it would still help offer a stable solution for all those Syrian refugees that, for one reason or another, will stay in Turkey in the long-term. Those who cannot return or resettle will still need to be properly integrated to alleviate the socio-economic burden on them, Turkey, and its donors.

However, the key question is whether there would also be the *political will* to adopt it.

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<sup>111</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), “Türkiye: Press remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas at the joint press conference”, Press release (Brussels, 24 January 2025), [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/türkiye-press-remarks-high-representativevice-president-kaja-kallas-joint-press-conference\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/türkiye-press-remarks-high-representativevice-president-kaja-kallas-joint-press-conference_en) (accessed 06 April 2025).

5.

# Assessing the TC's Political Feasibility for the EU, the UK, and Switzerland

While the economic impact of the TC has been well studied by the UNDP, what remains unclear is the proposal's *political feasibility*. The subsequent question is *whether* Turkey's international partners in North America and Europe *would be willing* to implement the TC and *what* this political will *would depend on*.

Therefore, to explore whether there may be any gain in further pursuing a realisation of the TC, our study addresses the European leg of this potential cooperation by seeking to identify the key political factors and actors shaping the prospects of the TC's adoption by the EU, the UK, and Switzerland. In so doing, we placed a special focus on Germany, as it is the EU's main trading partner with Turkey and a key player in EU-Turkey relations.

To gain insight into the political landscape that the TC falls into, we conducted and analysed 50 interviews with policymakers, officials, and third-sector experts in Ankara, Istanbul, Brussels, Berlin, London, Bern and Geneva, which lay the empirical foundation of the findings of our study. The interviews were held between April and October 2024.

It is the very breadth and high calibre of our interviewees' profiles that gives weight to our study. The institutions from which our interviewees hail include the Turkish Migration Office, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the EU Delegation to Turkey, the Embassies of Poland and Switzerland to Turkey, the German parties CDU (Christian Democratic Union of Germany), SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) and Greens, the German Federal Chancellery, the German Ministry of Interior, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Ministry for Economic Affairs and the German Ministry for Development as well as the UK's Department for Business and Trade, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the UK House of Commons, the UK House of Lords, and the Swiss Foreign Office. In Brussels, we

interviewed staff from the European External Action Service (EEAS), DG NEAR, DG TRADE, DG HOME, DG AGRI, DG ECHO, and DG INTPA. Moreover, we spoke to experts at the WTO, the UNHCR and the UNCTAD as well as at think tanks such as the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), the European Policy Centre, the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the German Centre for Integration and Migration (DeZIM), Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Economic Development Foundation (IKV), the Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy (EDAM), and the Geneva Trade Platform. A detailed list of our interviews is presented in Annex I.

All the data thus collected was treated strictly anonymously and without any reference to names or specific institutions throughout our report, as we assured our interviewees when seeking their consent in writing or orally. Our research project underwent an ethics review at the LSE.

We sampled our interviewees based on availability, insight, and influence, as well as with a view to covering a wide range of different political, institutional, and substantive perspectives. All these interviewees were then asked what they thought about the UNDP's proposal for a "Türkiye Compact" as such and whether they thought the proposal was viable politically. In speaking to them, we specifically focused on three questions:

- Could there be a political interest in such a proposal (in your organisation/country/the EU) from your point of view?
- What obstacles (political, institutional, legal, or practical) would an adoption of the UNDP's "Türkiye Compact" proposal face?
- And based on that, what would need to happen or be changed about the proposal to make it more politically feasible?

Throughout every interview we took extensive notes (no audio recordings), which we later analysed to identify the major themes across them (a method also called Thematic Analysis). Based on this analysis, our report provides a presentation and discussion of these themes as well as a list of implications for the future of the TC proposal. This will be followed by our recommendations on how to address these implications to give the TC a chance.

The legacy of the 2015 refugee crisis still affects migration policy across Europe, as reflected in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum as well as recent national policy initiatives and election results in various EU member states. In response to this need to develop more sustainable migration and refugee policies, our report concludes with recommendations on how the UNDP's proposal for a "Türkiye Compact" could contribute to addressing this challenge and offer long-term solutions for Turkey, its Syrian refugees, and the EU. Finally, we also suggest that, despite all obstacles, the TC

has the potential to become a general model for future cooperation on migration and refugees between the Global North and South.

6.

# Political Drivers of the “Türkiye Compact”

6.1

## Making Migration Agreements Sustainable Through a Developmental Approach

European governments are focused on minimising irregular migration to the EU. To do so, migration agreements with third countries, such as the EU-Turkey Statement from 18 March 2016, have become popular. However, European stakeholders increasingly stress the need to make such agreements sustainable to prevent the possibility of future collapse. This requires a greater focus on the receiving societies in the partner countries,<sup>112</sup> which the “Türkiye Compact” offers with its emphasis on the self-reliance of refugees and the resilience of host communities.

Across our interviews, there was a consensus that the EU must transition from purely humanitarian assistance to a more developmental approach regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey, improving their economic inclusion rather than relying on short-term support. In fact, as some of our interlocutors in Brussels rightfully underlined, the European Commission has already been shifting towards a developmental approach to supporting refugees outside the EU, including the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Therefore, supporting the TC would be in line with such a policy direction, the respective interviewees noted. This perspective was shared by many EU officials and political representatives, emphasising that the system of providing only basic aid did not offer dignity nor long-term solutions for refugees in protracted situations. The “Türkiye Compact” embodies this developmental logic, promoting a more sustainable and integrated approach to supporting refugees, which the interviewees welcomed as a new tool to manage irregular migration.

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<sup>112</sup> Sinem Adar and Friedrich Püttmann, 2022.

According to our German and British interviewees, a more sustainable approach to the existing EU-Turkey Statement needs to include stabilising Turkey and its economy. This is especially the case as it was reported that there was, in German and UK public administrations, a clear awareness that Turkey was at the heart of the East Mediterranean route, and that irregular migration to Europe could not be managed without Turkey. In addition, for several of our German interviewees, the logic of the “Türkiye Compact” also spoke to their search for “smarter approaches to development policy”, which triggered their interest in it. In this line, some of the interviewed German public administrators were confident that Germany’s position on Turkey and refugees would “weigh the heaviest in Brussels” and that it could be communicated to the Turkish side that furthering the integration of Syrian refugees more proactively was in their interest, too. A critical element of this, according to them, would be to really provide greater benefits to the Turkish host society as well, as foreseen by the TC and the whole-of-society-approach of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Moreover, for some German officials, a shift towards a more developmental approach came with the advantage of having more control over how the EU was supporting Turkey: “The thing with humanitarian assistance is that you can never really fully be sure how it is used on the ground and whether it really benefits the refugees.” This concern was especially grounded in the recurring criticism from the publics in Europe that the funds agreed under the EU-Turkey Statement were actually benefiting the Turkish government, not refugees. Similarly, various EU officials also viewed the approach underlying the “Türkiye Compact” positively because member states were increasingly less willing to contribute new funds to the EU-Turkey Statement. As a case in point, the last round of funding had to come from the European Commission’s own budget for the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), a part of the EU’s Global Gateway Strategy.<sup>113</sup>

The need for a new approach to EU migration policy that was also financially more sustainable was therefore very present in Brussels, with many EU officials emphasising the EU’s “desperate need for an exit strategy” from the EU’s support to refugees and host communities in Turkey. In this regard, some interviewees even hypothesised that, if successful, the TC could eventually become a “role model” for EU migration policy in the future. A central consideration against which this hope was expressed was that the European Court of Auditors had criticised the EU’s engagement for refugees and host communities in Turkey for being “too focused on output and too little on outcomes”, as one European Commission official put it to us. Building on this, several EU officials informed us that the EU’s Delegation to Türkiye

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<sup>113</sup> European Commission (EC), *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe)* (Brussels, 24 November 2024), [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en) (accessed 24 November 2024).

was therefore “fully in favour” of a shift from pure humanitarian to developmental assistance concerning Turkey’s Syrian refugees.

Finally, the basic logic of the TC was also welcomed among policymakers. As one interlocutor connected to the European People’s Party (EPP) put it to us: “We must end the system of purely alighting refugees because it is neither in our financial interest nor giving them personal dignity. Therefore, the TC’s approach is a welcome innovation.” Similarly, Members of the European Parliament, such as Lena Düpont (EPP), have argued that “we [the EU] urgently need to break the silos between development aid, neighbourhood policy, humanitarian support, and third-country cooperation”,<sup>114</sup> which calls for an approach to refugee reception that not only treats it as a humanitarian issue but, just like the TC suggests, also mobilises different policy tools to enhance its sustainability. Such an approach was also recommended by the European Commission in a communication to the European Parliament regarding the establishment of a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, stating that “to have a real impact, the EU cannot rely on its migration toolkit alone”.<sup>115</sup> All this made the TC highly interesting to many of our interviewees.

## 6.2 Technical Feasibility

The feasibility of the TC hinges on political will. Technically, there are no legal obstacles arising from trade law, as our interviews (especially at the WTO) confirmed. As mentioned earlier on the existing bilateral preferential trade agreement between the EU and Turkey, covering agricultural products offers the possibility for the full removal of tariffs on agricultural exports from Turkey. As pointed out by our interviewees in Brussels, such a policy would resemble that of the “autonomous trade measure” adopted for Ukraine in 2022. A similar approach could apply to the UK and Switzerland, as both countries have free trade agreements with Turkey that have extensions covering agricultural products, resembling the arrangement that Turkey has with the EU. The one with the UK was adopted in January 2021 as a “continuity” agreement to ensure a smooth continuation of trade between the two sides after Brexit. Industrial goods, as well as some agricultural products, benefit from zero

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<sup>114</sup> Lena Düpont, *The New Pact on Migration and Asylum: Necessary progress, but not a magic bullet*, Commentary (Brussels: European Policy Centre [EPC], March 2024), <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/The-New-Pact-on-Migration-and-Asylum~59419c> (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>115</sup> EUR-Lex, 2016.

tariffs, while a range of agricultural products enjoy preferential customs duties.<sup>116</sup> Both sides are committed to upgrading the existing agreement; however, negotiations have not yet started, and it is not clear how such a new agreement will impact trade in agricultural products. In the case of Switzerland, the free trade agreement with Turkey encompasses all EFTA countries, including Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway. The treaty was modernised in 2018 so as to cover industrial goods including processed agricultural products, while for basic agricultural products, Switzerland has a separate agreement with Turkey. In parallel to the modernised EFTA–Turkey FTA, this agreement was updated to introduce additional market access preferences.<sup>117</sup> As in the case of the EU, these free trade arrangements do provide the framework for an adoption of the TC by the UK and Switzerland, should the political will emerge.

## 6.3

# A Positive Agenda with Turkey

The European Council’s conclusions from October 2020<sup>118</sup> and more recently April 2024<sup>119</sup> emphasise launching a positive EU–Turkey agenda focused *inter alia* on facilitating trade and fostering cooperation on migration. More specifically, the agenda from 2020 includes the recommendation to “continue support to refugees and host communities in Türkiye”, and to adapt to “the current realities on the ground”, reflecting both the EU’s interests in migration policy and also in a new rapprochement with Turkey. However, it is only with the release of the report by the EU’s High Representative in November 2023 that the new positive EU–Turkey agenda began to take off.<sup>120</sup>

Our interviews revealed a strong desire in Germany for better relations with Turkey, linking economic cooperation to migration management. In this context, the adoption of the “Türkiye Compact” was seen as a possible step in that direction. As one German public administrator put it: “Often, there may be more motives for pursuing a certain policy than what may seem to be the obvious reason.” By this, they meant that the TC was not only of interest to public administrators working on migration, but also to

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<sup>116</sup> Gen Temizer, “UK–Turkey Free Trade Agreement: Key Points Guide”, *Mondaq* (online), 12 January 2021, <https://www.mondaq.com/turkey/international-trade-investment/1024822/uk-turkey-free-trade-agreement-key-points-guide> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>117</sup> Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate, *Fact Sheet: Free trade agreement between the EFTA states and Turkey*, COO.2101.104.4.3541639 (Bern, 06 July 2018).

<sup>118</sup> European Council (EC), “European Council conclusions on external relations, 1 October 2020”, Press release (Brussels, 01 October 2020), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/01/european-council-conclusions-on-external-relations-1-october-2020/> (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>119</sup> European Council (EC), *Special meeting of the European Council (17 and 18 April 2024) – Conclusions*, EUCO 12/24 (Brussels, 18 April 2024), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/m5jlweop/euco-conclusions-20240417-18-en.pdf> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>120</sup> European Commission (EC), 2023.

those working on German and EU foreign policy more generally. In this way, a positive side effect of implementing the TC could be to mend the EU's general ties with Turkey and thereby ultimately also advance cooperation in other foreign policy fields. Moreover, especially in Germany, many companies were hoping for better relations with Turkey to advance their business interests and production in Turkey. German companies' interest in Turkey as both a consumer base and hub for further distribution is also openly advocated by the German Turkish Chamber of Industry and Commerce.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, another element that, according to our interviews, could increase the EU's interest in the "Türkiye Compact" and in job creation in Turkey both for the Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens was the fact that Turkish citizens were by now among the biggest groups seeking asylum in Europe.<sup>122</sup> The TC could make a modest contribution to stabilising the Turkish economy and thereby may help prevent irregular migration from Turkey to the EU.<sup>123</sup> This is especially the case because the adoption of the TC could also be made conditional on facilitated returns of rejected asylum-seekers from Germany to Turkey, as some of our interlocutors in Berlin proposed, since that was an issue of bilateral conflict between the two countries.<sup>124</sup>

Additionally, the "Türkiye Compact" could serve as a transitional arrangement towards a modernised Customs Union, reinforcing positive ties between the EU and Turkey. This was especially emphasised as many of our interviewees estimated the modernisation of the Customs Union to still take a lot of time, given the pace at which related negotiations typically take place and the existing political resistance to it inside the EU. According to our interviewees, the TC would both prevent worries

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<sup>121</sup> "German firms see Turkey as hub for accessing 1.5B populated market", *Daily Sabah* (online), 18 October 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/german-firms-see-turkey-as-hub-for-accessing-15b-populated-market> (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>122</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "EU received over 1.1 million asylum applications in 2023", Press release (28 February 2024), <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/eu-received-over-1-million-asylum-applications-2023> (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>123</sup> In recent years there has been a growing number of Turkish nationals, especially young people, leaving the country for a mixture of economic and political reasons. Some leave the country via regular migration paths, while others resort to irregular ones or the asylum path. Tanya Basarab (ed.), "Youth brain drain from the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership and Türkiye" (Strasbourg/ Brussels: Council of Europe and European Commission [EC], September 2024), <https://edoc.coe.int/en/youth/11979-youth-brain-drain-from-the-western-balkans-the-eastern-partnership-and-tuerkiye.html> (accessed 24 November 2024); Yağmur Uzunırmak, *Türkiye'nin Beyin Göçü Raporu 4* [*Türkiye's Brain Drain Report*], Toplum Çalışmaları Enstitüsü, 25 November 2024, <https://www.toplum.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Turkiye-nin-Beyin-Gocu-Raporu-TCE.pdf> and Kemal Kirişçi, "An Exodus of Professionals: The End of Politics in Turkey?", *Just Security* (online), September 25, 2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/88694/an-exodus-of-professionals-the-end-of-politics-in-turkey/> (accessed 24 November 2024)

<sup>124</sup> Murat Yetkin, "Scholz's Türkiye visit: Germany needs a new narrative", *Yetkin Report* (online), 19 October 2024, <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2024/10/19/scholz-turkiye-visit-germany-needs-a-new-narrative/> (accessed 24 November 2024).

among EU critics of a Customs Union modernisation at this point and show good will in the direction of Turkey that such a modernisation may be reached at some point.

Another element of this intended launch of a positive agenda with Turkey, especially since the Covid crisis, was the growing calls for near shoring with industrial production in the direct vicinity of the EU. In this context, the EU's new supply chain regulation from 25 July 2024<sup>125</sup> was also a catalyst of intensifying trade with Turkey, as some of our German interlocutors pointed out. The regulation makes EU companies responsible for ensuring that their suppliers do not contribute to human rights abuses or environmental damage. With Turkey being closer to the EU than many other places of production, this made it significantly easier for EU companies to control their suppliers. In short, stimulating the Turkish economy, as the TC would do, would be in the wider socioeconomic interest of the EU, as some of our interviewees suggested.

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<sup>125</sup> European Commission (EC), "New rules fostering sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour enter into force", Press release (Brussels, 25 July 2024), [https://commission.europa.eu/news/new-rules-fostering-sustainable-and-responsible-corporate-behaviour-enter-force-2024-07-25\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news/new-rules-fostering-sustainable-and-responsible-corporate-behaviour-enter-force-2024-07-25_en) (accessed 24 November 2024).

7.

# Political Obstacles to the “Türkiye Compact”

7.1

## Opposition from EU Farmers

The prospects of the “Türkiye Compact” being adopted face significant challenges in the EU, primarily due to potential impacts on European farmers, who are likely to oppose any policy that could undermine their livelihoods. The political climate is already fraught, especially following farmer protests in Germany, France and Brussels against EU agricultural regulations and tariff-free imports of agricultural products from Ukraine in Poland and Slovakia. Critics argue that the Compact’s study on its economic feasibility overlooks its negative effects on European jobs, as any increase in agricultural imports from Turkey could exacerbate competition for local farmers. While the “Türkiye Compact” aims to address human rights and migration issues by supporting Syrian refugees in Turkey, it simultaneously creates tension between the EU’s migration and agricultural policies. Additionally, historical resistance from farmers regarding trade agreements indicates that similar opposition could undermine the Compact’s adoption. The political ramifications could lead to its stagnation, with policymakers hesitant to support a proposal seen as politically costly.

This is especially so in a political climate that is already highly sensitive regarding EU agricultural policy, following the partly violent protests by farmers in major EU member states, such as Germany and France, in the spring of 2024.<sup>126</sup> As one German parliamentarian put it: “Any policy that could add to the burden on farmers is doomed to fail these days. If the TC affects European farmers, you might as well simply drop it.” And as another interviewee added: “A crucial mistake of the UNDP’s economic feasibility study regarding the TC is that they only modelled the economic effects on one side, i.e. the jobs that would be created in Turkey, and did not model the jobs that would be destroyed in Europe.” As it became clear throughout the great majority of our interviews, one major weakness of the “Türkiye Compact” is that agriculture has

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<sup>126</sup> Christina Lu, “Europe’s Farmer Protests Are Part of a Bigger Problem”, *Foreign Policy* (online), 20 February 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/20/europe-farmers-protests-climate-eu-green-deal/> (accessed 24 November 2024).

become such a sensitive political topic in the EU at a time when farmers have been protesting new regulatory measures adopted by the EU to transition to a green economy, impacting them adversely in their view. For the EU to allow in cheaper agricultural imports at this point would therefore be highly explosive politically in most of our interviewees' view.

An attractive aspect of the TC is that, by improving the socio-economic situation of some of Turkey's Syrian refugees, it simultaneously addresses concerns about human rights, labour standards and refugees more generally and concerns about irregular migration to Europe and EU public expenditures on humanitarian assistance. As detailed in the previous sections, the key concept for both goals is strengthening the Syrian refugees' economic self-reliance. However, while the "Türkiye Compact" manages to close a *political* divide in the EU, it directly feeds into a *sectoral* divide between two different policy fields: migration and agriculture.

Just like other EU citizens, many European farmers might be concerned about irregular migration. However, as practically all of our interviewees stressed, the competition from additional agricultural imports from Turkey implied by the TC could make the farmers feel "sacrificed" for the EU's migration management and thus make them opposed to it. And as many interviewees furthermore added, the farmers' protests that would likely follow would represent a central reason for many EU policymakers to "not even look into" the "Türkiye Compact" – even if it advanced their interests in migration policy. That is because the sizeable political leverage that European farmers have gained through their latest protests has drastically increased the political cost of advocating for any policy that may damage the farmers' interests. As one European Commission official put it: "The problem is that at the level of agriculture only, the TC offers benefits to Turkish farmers but not to European ones." This was also echoed in Berlin, where one interviewee at the German parliament urged that without any benefits also for EU agriculture, the TC was very unlikely to ever take off.

This problem especially concerns European Conservatives and Christian Democrats. Members of the European People's Party are eager to come up with new ideas on how to reduce irregular migration to the EU, as this is in the interest of most of their electorates. However, at the same time, in many EU member states, EPP member parties also have a tradition of being the guardians of farmers' interests.<sup>127</sup> The central position of both reducing irregular migration and supporting European farmers in the political agenda of the EPP is also reflected in their latest party manifesto from 2023.<sup>128</sup> For the EPP, a proposal like the TC therefore represents a particularly

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<sup>127</sup> European People's Party (EPP), *EPP Manifesto 2024* (2024): 5–7, 16–18, [https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2024/03/Manifesto\\_2024.pdf](https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2024/03/Manifesto_2024.pdf) (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>128</sup> Mared Gwyn Jones, "From migration crackdown to Green Deal overhaul: Key takeaways from the EPP manifesto", *EuroNews* (online), 06 March 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my->

challenging dilemma as, on the one hand, it would reduce the prospects of irregular secondary movements towards Europe, yet, on the other, it undermines the interests of the farmers. How this dilemma could be resolved would be critical to the TC ever being adopted, as the EPP enjoys considerable influence within the EP and its position would be critical to any decision coming from the Council enjoying the EP's support, too.

Another dilemma concerns the EU's southern member states. While many of them are on the EU's external border and are therefore most concerned by irregular migration to the EU, their agricultural produce is often very similar to that of Turkey, which would place the biggest burden of increased competition from duty-free agricultural imports from Turkey on them, and thus create another conflict of interests. Supposing that the two interests may cancel each other out, they are thus unlikely to support an adoption of the "Türkiye Compact", unless the damage it may inflict on their farmers can somehow be lessened or avoided. Our interviewees also raised similar concerns in the case of the UK. However, the intensity of objection was said to probably be lower, as the UK is a big importer of agricultural products anyway. As one MP suggested, some policymakers could even present an increase in cheaper Turkish agricultural imports as a contribution to the fight against the cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

Cases in point are the new EU-Mercosur deal and the EU's trade agreement with Australia.<sup>129</sup> The EU-Mercosur trade agreement aims to "increase bilateral trade and investment, and lower tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, notably for small and medium sized enterprises" for Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and, according to the European Commission, "represents a win-win for both the EU and Mercosur, creating opportunities for growth, jobs and sustainable development on both sides".<sup>130</sup> However, as one interviewee pointed out, this trade agreement is being impeded by issues relating to European farmers and their concerns, impacting the political position of some of their governments - particularly France and Italy.<sup>131</sup> The same applies to the case of the trade concessions that had been granted to Ukrainian agricultural products to support Ukraine in its defence against Russia's assault.

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[europe/2024/03/06/from-migration-crackdown-to-green-deal-overhaul-key-takeaways-from-the-epp-manifesto](https://europe/2024/03/06/from-migration-crackdown-to-green-deal-overhaul-key-takeaways-from-the-epp-manifesto) (accessed 24 Nov 2024).

<sup>129</sup> "Les agriculteurs élèvent leur voix contre l'accord de libre-échange UE-Mercosur"[ Farmers raise their voices against the EU-Mercosur free trade agreement], *Dhnet* (online), 29 October 2024, <https://bit.ly/45rizFI> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>130</sup> European Commission (EC), *EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement* (Brussels, 06 December 2024) [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/mercotur/eu-mercotur-agreement\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/mercotur/eu-mercotur-agreement_en) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>131</sup> The agreement was finally adopted in December 2024 after the objections from farmers were overcome, but the agreement still needs the European Council's ratification. France, Austria and Poland oppose the agreement. If another country such as Italy were to join them, the agreement would fail to pass. Federico Steinberg, *What Are the Implications of the EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 06 December 2024), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-are-implications-eu-mercotur-free-trade-agreement> (accessed 06 April 2025).

Against a background of widespread farmers' protests, in March 2024, the EU was compelled to introduce safeguards to the import of certain agricultural products to protect farmers' interests.<sup>132</sup>

As a consequence of the above, some interviewees raised their overall concern that the TC could remain an “orphan”, given its political costs that no policymakers would want to “pick up and lobby for” – the “complications” and “controversy” it would spark were simply too much for anyone to “invest their time and energy”.

## 7.2

# Confusion of the TC with a Hidden Modernisation of the Customs Union

Several interviewees viewed the TC as a potential modernisation of the Customs Union “through the backdoor” and therefore raised concerns that various EU member states could be opposed to it, given ongoing political issues with this modernisation. At the same time, other interviewees were concerned that Turkey could view the TC as a replacement of a modernised Customs Union and therefore oppose the TC, too.

The TC and the modernisation of the Customs Union are two separate issues. The latter would be a very complex process that would entail the expansion of the Customs Union to domains beyond industrial goods to cover services, agricultural products and introduction of new provisions for dispute settlement. However, as discussed earlier, the negotiations have not even started and when they do start, they are likely to take a long time. Eventually, the modernisation may not necessarily include liberalisation for the agricultural sector. Furthermore, as many of our interlocutors pointed out, the ongoing conflict in Cyprus is likely to be a major impediment to the conclusion of a new deal for the Customs Union. The conflict, without going into details, remains the most central one in the “maze of disputes” between the EU and Turkey.<sup>133</sup> This is because Turkey did not extend the application of the Customs Union to the Republic of Cyprus in 2005, denying Cyprus any direct trade and air-maritime communications

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<sup>132</sup> For the introduction of safeguards, see Council of the European Union, “Ukraine: Council and Parliament reach a deal to renew EU’s autonomous trade measures”, Press release (Brussels, 20 March 2024), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/03/20/ukraine-council-and-parliament-reach-a-deal-to-renew-eu-s-autonomous-trade-measures/> (accessed 06 April 2025). For coverage of the protests, including against cheap Ukrainian imports: John Henley, “Farmers clash with riot police in Brussels as EU agriculture leaders meet”, *The Guardian* (online), 26 February 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/26/farmers-protests-brussels-eu-agriculture-leaders-riot-police> (accessed 03 April 2025).

<sup>133</sup> Adam Michalski, 2024.

with Turkey.<sup>134</sup> The resolution of this situation remains a *sine qua non* for the modernisation of the Customs Union. In this context, one interviewee underlined the general lack of trust in Turkey on the part of the EU. This was especially so, the interviewee added, when it came to the implementation of the Customs Union, which resulted from the Cyprus issue and other recurring disputes over the implementation of the CU between the two sides.

The TC, on the other hand, is completely independent from the Customs Union. The adoption of the TC would be a stand-alone decision separate from the modernisation of the Customs Union. It would enable exports of solely agricultural products involving refugee labour and would not prejudice the modernisation of the Customs Union in any way. In fact, the TC would become moot in the event of the Customs Union being modernised in a manner that includes agricultural products. That said, albeit unjustified, the general association of the TC proposal with the modernisation of the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU among stakeholders in policymaking crystallised as one of the obstacles any adoption of the TC would face. This is another example of the “thinking in silos” that MEP Lena Düpont has publicly criticised.<sup>135</sup>

## 7.3 Turkey’s Position

One issue that was mentioned across our interviews in Berlin, Bern, Brussels, Geneva, and London was the question of whether Turkey itself wanted an implementation of the “Türkiye Compact”. Many therefore emphasised that, for the TC to become reality, Turkey would have to make the first step and take political ownership of the proposal. That was for three reasons.

*First*, several interviewees expressed scepticism of whether Turkey indeed wants a better and long-term integration of the Syrian refugees in Turkey – rather than simply constituting a temporary host country. That Turkey is not keen on moving beyond this status is in fact typical of many refugee-hosting countries: the preference is always for the refugees to return rather than to reside in the country forever, as one of our interviewees in Geneva explained to us based on the UNHCR’s findings. With refugee resentment on a steep rise in Turkey, and with President Erdoğan having shifted his discourse on the issue from a narrative of welcome and solidarity to one of large-scale returns, as already discussed in the context section of this report above,

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<sup>134</sup> In July 2005, when Turkey adopted the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement extending its Customs Union with the EU after the enlargement of the EU in 2004, Cyprus was excluded and this became a major impediment in Turkey’s relations with the EU, including the accession process, see European Commission (EC), 2023: 6.

<sup>135</sup> Lena Düpont, 2024: 16

many of our European interlocutors felt uneasy about pushing for a policy that may not even be supported by Turkey.

The central role that the Syrian refugee issue played in the second round of the Turkish presidential elections in May 2023 – during which the political opposition promised the mass deportation of more or less all Syrian refugees to Syria through a deal with Syria’s Assad – engendered this impression of our interlocutors. Turkish and international NGOs working on improving social cohesion between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees have informally reported to us that they have often felt that their work was becoming futile, as Turkish governmental institutions were increasingly opposed to their activities per se and instead asking for the EU to support Turkey’s efforts to return the Syrians.<sup>136</sup> As one European Commission official put it to us: “Turkey has clearly told the EU that they want to reduce irregular migration [to Turkey] and return the Syrian refugees. But the EU takes issue with that: North Syria remains unsafe, and we cannot cooperate with the Syrian regime.”

However, the likelihood of such a policy change occurring in reality is more than doubtful, as background talks with Turkish officials also indicated to us. One case in point is a new piece of Turkish labour legislation that actively seeks to facilitate formal employment for Syrian refugees. This more “realistic” vision and pragmatic approach of Turkey’s Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) was also recognised by officials in the European Commission, as our interviews in Brussels indicated. These officials also noted that the PMM had signalled an interest to intensify cooperation on reducing irregular migration and on enabling returns of unsuccessful asylum-seekers to their countries of origin, given that Turkey has turned from a country of transit into a country of destination for many irregular migrants in recent years. Moreover, several Commission officials questioned the feasibility of mass returns to Syria, suggesting that Turkey unofficially knew that this was never going to happen and the official numbers by the Turkish government on returns to Syria were “not reliable”. Many Syrian refugees had already settled in Turkey, with thousands of new children being born to them each year, and the Turkish government was aware that sending them all to Syria was highly unlikely, they claimed. Therefore, a “meaningful discussion on integration” was needed now.

Still, in light of Turkey’s official position on this issue, in particular the lawmakers that we interviewed were wary of upsetting their Turkish counterparts by pursuing a policy proposal that did not have official Turkish approval – both because it would sour EU-Turkish relations and because it would hamper the actual implementation of

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<sup>136</sup> Other research based on extensive interviews with stakeholders makes similar observations, too, M. Murat Erdoğan et al., *Social Cohesion of Syrian Refugees in Türkiye and Conditions for IDPs in Syria after the Earthquake February 6, 2023*, Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, Institute for the Study of International Migration, and IGAM Academy, March 2025) <https://isim.georgetown.edu/research/isim-working-papers/social-cohesion-of-syrian-refugees-in-turkiye/> (accessed 06 April 2025).

the TC, even if, legally speaking, the implementation of the TC did not require Turkish support. In the words of one interviewee from the European Commission:

Turkey's support of such a proposal would be the most crucial condition. Unless the awareness of the need for long-term integration of the Syrian refugees in Turkey becomes political reality, we cannot move. Any such proposal will need, from the get-go, explicit co-operation from the Turks. Syrian refugees' integration into the formal labour market in Turkey is a good idea from an EU perspective – but wouldn't the Turkish government oppose it? There is a number of authorities in Turkey with whom this would have to be discussed: the Presidency of Migration Management, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Family Affairs, etc. But first, we need the political will in Turkey. Turkey needs to recognise the Syrians' long-term stay in Turkey.

An additional reason why our interviewees were sceptical of whether Turkey would ever support this policy approach was their perception that the concerned Turkish business owners may oppose the TC. This is, the interviewees argued, because they would stand to lose more benefits from the irregular employment of the Syrian refugees than they might be able to gain from the new facilitated trade opportunities with the EU tied to formal employment. Indeed, the benefits to Turkish business of employing Syrian refugees informally were quite openly mentioned in 2021 by Turkey's then Minister for the Environment and Urban Planning.<sup>137</sup> In the view of the interviewee, these Turkish business owners already possess significant political leverage over the Turkish government. As a result, the EU could face a broad coalition of opposition in Turkey, spanning voters, businesses, and the government, if it were to propose the adoption of the TC on its own initiative.

Overall, there was thus broad agreement across our interviews that neither Germany nor the EU or international organisations would further pursue the TC unless Turkey would explicitly declare its interest in it.

*Second*, apart from the question of whether Turkey was in favour or not of the TC, several of our interviewees moreover emphasised that for sheer procedural reasons, Turkey should be the one to make the first step on its implementation. This would not only respect the general international framework, but it would also be more strategic. That is because, in this manner, Turkey would retain more ownership of the policy proposal and could make any necessary alterations that better reflect its policy preferences and needs on the grounds, in the spirit of subsidiarity. As policymakers and researchers in Germany have previously stated, the chances of success for an

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<sup>137</sup> “AKP'li Özhasseki'nin 'Mültecilerin ekonomiye katkısı var' açıklamasına yanıt: Katkıyı kayıtsız istihdam ile yapıyorlar” [Response to AKP's Özhasseki's statement that 'Refugees contribute to the economy': They make the contribution through unregistered employment], T24 (online), 27 July 2021, [https://t24.com.tr/haber/akp-li-ozhasseki-nin-multecilerin-ekonomiye-katkisi-var-aciklamasina-yanit-katkiyi-kayitsiz-istihdam-ile-yapiyorlar,968414#google\\_vignette](https://t24.com.tr/haber/akp-li-ozhasseki-nin-multecilerin-ekonomiye-katkisi-var-aciklamasina-yanit-katkiyi-kayitsiz-istihdam-ile-yapiyorlar,968414#google_vignette) (accessed 06 April 2025).

update to the EU-Turkey Statement are the highest if initiated by Turkey and proposed to the EU with the direct support of EU member states that enjoy significant leverage inside the EU, such as Germany, or that are most concerned by the issue, such as Greece.<sup>138</sup> But if Turkey did not take such an initiative, then, as many of our interviewees underlined, it was unlikely that any EU member state would do so in its place. This point was also made by our interviewees in the UK and Switzerland, regarding which the British were particularly wary of causing damage to the UK's public image by potentially seeming to impose itself on Turkey.

A *third* reason for the importance of Turkey formally proposing the TC, which was especially prominent in our interviews with German lawmakers and officials, was the unfavourable image of the Turkish government in the German (and European) wider public. As one German parliamentarian put it, many in the EU no longer trust the Turkish government, and unless this trust were restored, an adoption of the TC would be very unlikely. For this, Turkey would have to *show* that it really wants to cooperate, which seems to not be the case in the eyes of this parliamentarian. Several of our interviews in Brussels echoed this: “It is the general state of EU-Turkey relations that is hampering any progress on this issue, as it is no longer simply humanitarian but political”, as one European Commission official put it. Another described the situation as such that Turkey wanted to deepen relations, intensifying cooperation on such topics as counterterrorism, energy, and especially trade, which the European Commission supported. However, the European Council was very hesitant about this, given the loss of trust resulting from events in the recent past, such as Turkey's drilling for gas near Cyprus and the tensions at the Greek-Turkish border. Now, EU-Turkey relations were better again, the official noted, but still not good enough to tackle the issue of migration in a thorough way - especially given how sensitive migration had become politically. In the same vein, another interviewee inside the Commission shared with us that “nobody [in the EU] knows how to make progress [in EU-Turkey relations] because, in the case of Turkey, everything is related to the Cyprus question”. These testimonies show how very intricate the various dimensions of EU-Turkey relations are, and that hardly any of them can be independently addressed without invoking political opposition due to tensions in another policy field – or in general.

In contrast, this was not understood to be the case regarding the UK. In the words of one official, the UK considers itself “one of Turkey's best friends in the West”, seeing itself as immune from the political tensions between Turkey and the EU. This, the official argued, enables both sides to take a more pragmatic approach to their cooperation: “Turkey feels that the UK understands them.” Therefore, for the UK, it was not because of trust issues that Turkish ownership of the TC was important, but

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<sup>138</sup> Walter Glos, M. Murat Erdoğan and Friedrich Püttmann, *Much to agree on, but no agreement (yet) – Conclusions from the Virtual Migration Summit 2020 of KAS Turkey*, Event Report (Ankara: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung [KAS], October 2020), <https://bit.ly/44bBvpU> (accessed 24 November 2024).

rather because, after Brexit, the UK would likely refrain from simply joining an EU-Turkey bilateral cooperation mechanism and prefer an agreement of its own.

## 7.4

# Political Opposition to Issue and Policy Linkage

The central innovation of the TC is to attain migration policy goals through trade policy tools. This approach is in line with the EU's new external migration strategy, which stipulates that all possible policy tools shall be used to institute greater cooperation from partner countries regarding the management of irregular migration.<sup>139</sup> However, this approach has also faced criticism in Brussels and beyond. A briefing by the European Parliament from 2017 states:

[This approach] many fear, may lead to the 'instrumentalisation' of development aid for migration management purposes. The European Parliament has taken a clear stand on this issue, calling, in a number of its recent resolutions, for the retention of poverty alleviation as the main goal of EU development policy, even when its instruments are used at the same time to tackle the root causes of migration.<sup>140</sup>

As one of the EU officials we interviewed shared with us, this dispute was also what torpedoed the negotiations on the EU's new General System of Preferences (GSP),<sup>141</sup> leading to a complete standstill of its renewal and a temporary extension of the current one. The European Commission was then tasked with developing a compromise between the position of the European Council, which largely supported this so-called issue-linkage approach, and the European Parliament that predominantly opposed it.

In several of our interviews in Brussels and Berlin, similar criticisms of the issue-linkage philosophy also came through regarding the TC. As one German official put it

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<sup>139</sup> European Commission (EC), *Migrant smuggling* (Brussels, 18 October 2024), [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/migrant-smuggling\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/migrant-smuggling_en) (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>140</sup> Marta Latek, *Growing impact of EU migration policy on development cooperation*, Briefing PR 614.577 (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service [EPRS], November 2017), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614577/EPRS\\_BRI\(2017\)614577\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614577/EPRS_BRI(2017)614577_EN.pdf) (accessed 24 November 2024).

<sup>141</sup> More on this here: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), *The European Parliament puts a brake on negotiations of the GSP trade scheme*, 23 June 2023, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/business-human-rights-environment/trade-and-investment-agreements/the-european-parliament-puts-a-brake-on-negotiations-of-the-gsp-trade> (accessed 06 April 2025).

to us, the then German government was opposing tying development and trade to cooperation on migration, so the “Türkiye Compact” would require it to diverge from this position. Meanwhile, some of our colleagues in research institutions argued that some legal analyses showed that “it is unlawful to use the GSP to get cooperation on migration” and that “also the EU-Turkey Statement was based on issue linkage, but many of the made concessions to Turkey in there never crystallised in the end”. Still others criticised the underlying aim of the TC to reduce irregular migration to the EU in the first place, arguing that it was fuelling the reigning atmosphere of seeing refugees as dangerous, rather than being concerned for their humanitarian situation. In brief, for the political left in Europe, especially in Germany, the idea of issue linkage was *in general* very delicate, which could mean that the TC would be rejected from this side of politics outright.

However, as one interviewee representing the political left in parliament suggested, their party, for example, could be convinced by pointing to the fact that the TC would substantively improve Syrian refugees’ living conditions in Turkey. For this interviewee, the problem behind the TC’s issue linkage was more that it could make the EU even more dependent on Turkey regarding migration and that it would even further lose its credibility as a defendant of human rights, as the externalisation of refugee reception was seen as directly undermining this idea.

Finally, as the TC would also substantively build upon the EU-Turkey Statement, some EU officials raised the worry that it could be perceived as a change of the Statement, and as the Statement was “treated like a holy cow” in Brussels, this could provoke immediate opposition across the EU. That was because there was the fear in Brussels that once any part of the Statement was changed, all other parts could be changed or questioned, too, and this had to be avoided at all costs. The TC’s issue-linkage approach could hence be seen as a rival to the Statement (even if that was not the case) and therefore lose the chance to find supporters.

## 7.5

# Uncertainty about Effectiveness

One of the main objectives of the TC is to enhance the self-reliance of refugees through sustainable employment. The expectation is that this will make them less likely to embark on secondary movements. Some of our interlocutors expressed scepticism about this, suggesting that “the assumption that nudging refugees into the formal economy will make them less likely to move needs to be questioned”, and in one case even argued that it is usually the economically better-off who are more able to organise a move. After all, those Syrians who irregularly went to Europe during the

2015–2016 migration crisis were mostly the better-educated and the better-off, too.<sup>142</sup> The argument here, in other words, is that sustainable employment is likely to equip refugees with the human capital that is likely to make them move to Europe. While there is research suggesting that, in the case of Turkey’s Syrian refugees, “employment opportunities in their current residence” is a crucial factor shaping the decision “to stay put”,<sup>143</sup> the concern as to whether the TC would work may be a substantial obstacle to its adoption.

Another element of this concern that was revealed in our interviews was a general scepticism regarding Turkey’s care in implementing its share of the TC and effectively ensuring better access to formal jobs for its Syrian refugees. Some interviewees therefore asked whether, as was the case with the EU–Jordan Compact, the trade benefits resulting from the TC could be tied to specific companies that provided proof of employing a certain percentage of refugees – an issue that would need to be explored, underlining the need for rigorous monitoring in Turkey.

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<sup>142</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR questionnaire finds most Syrians arriving in Europe coming directly from Syria*, Briefing Notes (online), 08 December 2015, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-questionnaire-finds-most-syrians-arriving-europe-coming-directly-syria> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>143</sup> Eda Kiriscioglu, Ayşen Üstübcü and Ezgi Elçi, “Migration aspirations in relation to border closures, employment opportunities and risk-taking attitudes: lessons from an online survey experiment”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 18 (2024): 4395–4416.

8.

# Conclusions: How the “Türkiye Compact” Could Become Politically Feasible

8.1

## Clarifying Turkey’s Position on the TC

Turkey’s stance on the TC reflects scepticism, with concerns that formal employment could allow refugees to become more settled – contrary to the public’s expectations and wishes. However, Turkey was one country that energetically advocated<sup>144</sup> for the idea of preferential trade arrangements to enhance refugees’ self-reliance and support for host states to be inserted into the GCR, and has been an advocate of the GCR.<sup>145</sup> Turkey’s “very active role in drafting the GCR” is acknowledged by the UNHCR.<sup>146</sup> As much as the current mood in the country is very much in favour of the repatriation of the refugees, there is also widespread recognition, including among

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<sup>144</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) USA, *Global Compact on Refugees, Fifth Formal Consultation Meeting, 12–13 June 2018 – Statement by Turkey – Agenda item 3: Programme of action: Areas in need of support (Part III.B)*, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/media/statement-turkey-fifth-formal-consultation-agenda-item-three> (accessed 06 April 2025).

Twenty two such Statements were submitted to the meetings during the drafting of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and they are all available online:

[https://www.unhcr.org/search?search=Turkey&sm\\_publication\\_media%5b%5d=Speeches%20and%20statements&sm\\_tags%5b%5d=state&tags\\_op=AND&sm\\_site\\_name%5b%5d=Global%20site](https://www.unhcr.org/search?search=Turkey&sm_publication_media%5b%5d=Speeches%20and%20statements&sm_tags%5b%5d=state&tags_op=AND&sm_site_name%5b%5d=Global%20site) (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>145</sup> Presidency of Turkey, “Küresel Mülteci Forumu’nda Yaptıkları Konuşma” [Speech delivered to the Global Refugee Forum], Press release (Ankara, 17 December 2019), <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/113993/kuresel-multeci-forumu-nda-yaptiklari-konusma> (accessed 06 April 2025).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum 2019*, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Outcome%20document%202019%20GRE.pdf> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>146</sup> For the quote, “Situation analysis” in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Focus UNHCR Operations Worldwide: Türkiye* (Geneva, January 2025), <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/turkiye#toc-narratives> (accessed 06 April 2025).

the public, that this may not be feasible given the prevailing situation in Syria. The regime change in Damascus, except for a brief period of euphoria, does not appear to have altered this reality. This was reflected, in no uncertain terms, when Erdoğan declared that refugees could stay on until the circumstances became favourable for their return.<sup>147</sup> Numerous government officials have also recognised this reality, and analysts also acknowledged that it might take years for Syria to stabilise and years for refugees to return home.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, considering the dire state of the Turkish economy, Turkish politics might well be favourably disposed to the TC's job creation and economic growth potential.

## 8.2

# Specifying the Precise Agricultural Products Turkey Would Export to the EU

While the TC would likely face opposition from European farmers, EU quotas on Turkish agricultural produce, in fact, already fluctuate based on seasonal production and the specific needs of EU member states. To reduce political resistance, the TC could be redesigned to limit tariff removals to Turkish products with minimal competition in the EU and high Syrian refugee employment, as some of our interviewees suggested. This approach could balance the interests of European farmers, create jobs in Turkey, and support EU migration policy goals. This would entail an incremental approach to the full adoption of the TC over time, as reciprocal confidence builds up and benefits of the TC manifest themselves.

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<sup>147</sup> “Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Presidency of Migration Management, 2024; “Erdoğan: Kalmak isteyen Suriyelilerin başımızın üstünde yeri var” [Erdoğan: Syrians who want to stay on are welcome], *10 Haber* (online), 13 December 2025, <https://10haber.net/siyaset/erdogan-kalmak-isteyen-suriyelilerin-basimizin-ustunde-yeri-var-570666/> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>148</sup> Reported in Fundanur Öztürk, “Suriye'ye gönüllü geri dönüş: ‘Henüz yoğun dönüş yok’” [Voluntary return to Syria: ‘No mass return yet’], *BBC Türkçe* (online), 13 December 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/ce8e49p091ro> (accessed 06 April 2024); Fatma Tanis, “Most Syrian refugees in Turkey are watching the new leadership before returning home”, *NPR* (online), 10 January 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/10/nx-s1-5247394/most-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-are-watching-the-new-leadership-before-returning-home> (accessed 06 April 2025).

## 8.3

# Crafting a Policy Narrative that Clearly Communicates the Benefits for all Sides

Policymakers need to manage both problems and their public perceptions. For the TC to succeed, an effective narrative would be needed that addresses concerns from European farmers, avoids appearing as EU capitulation to Turkey, and highlights the balance between migration control and humanitarian values. It must simultaneously underline the benefits for the Turkish host society and its economy, while allaying fears that such employment would automatically result in Syrians settling permanently. Whether this would best be done by way of one common narrative for all, or rather different ones for Turkey, the EU, the UK, and Switzerland respectively is up for discussion. The latest changes in Syria have opened the way home for many Syrian refugees, but a good number of them is likely to remain in Turkey if they are allowed to. This increases the need for stability in both Syria and Turkey and makes an adoption of the TC possibly more attractive, as it would support Syrian refugees in Turkey but indirectly also their personal reconstruction projects and potential future in Syria.

## 8.4

# Convincing the United States to Take Part in the TC

To a greater extent than with the EU, convincing the US to adopt the TC would be crucial to its success, as the US alone could create 190,000 jobs simply by removing tariffs on Turkish textile exports. Such US support would align with American refugee and post-earthquake commitments to Turkey.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, in the case of the US, the TC also has a commercial logic because Turkey is among the largest importers of US cotton.<sup>150</sup> Adoption of the TC would therefore create jobs both in Turkey and the US

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<sup>149</sup> Alper Çoskun and Kemal Kirişçi, *Can Syrian Refugees Help Improve Türkiye–U.S. Relations? Giving UNDP’s Türkiye Compact a Chance* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 05 December 2023), <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/12/can-syrian-refugees-help-improve-turkiye-us-relations-giving-undps-turkiye-compact-a-chance?lang=en&center=global> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>150</sup> United States Agricultural Export Development Council (US AEDC), *The 2024 COTTON USA™ Special Trade Mission Increases Collaboration Efforts Between the U.S. Cotton Industry and the Turkish Textile Industry*, <https://usaedc.org/casestudies/the-2024-cotton-usa-special-trade-mission-increases-collaboration-efforts-between-the-u-s-cotton-industry-and-the-turkish-textile-industry/> (accessed 06 April 2025);

and, as a result, may face less political opposition than in the EU. Crucially, the US would also be a key part of building an international coalition, together with relevant UN agencies, to advocate for the TC vis-à-vis the EU and Turkey.

## 8.5

# Ensuring that Some of the Newly Created Jobs Really Go to the Syrian Refugees

A major risk of the “Türkiye Compact” is that job creation for Syrian refugees may not meet expectations, as seen in the EU-Jordan Compact that failed to deliver. To ensure that Syrian refugees do benefit, the TC will need to include a system that can monitor Turkish companies enjoying tariff-free market access to the EU, assessing whether they uphold their commitments to employ Syrian refugees in line with ILO and Turkish legal standards. As stressed by the UNDP, an effective monitoring and certification system in Turkey would therefore be crucial to the TC’s success<sup>151</sup> and its potential future expansion after an initial small-scale test phase. Such a monitoring system would not be unusual as the Customs Union has an elaborate system based on government agencies and chamber of industries ensuring that Turkish industrial products meet EU standards.

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Eric C. Davis and Fred Gale, *Shift in Geography of China’s Cotton Production Reshapes Global Market*, Amber Waves (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service [USDA], 12 May 2022) <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2022/december/shift-in-geography-of-china-s-cotton-production-reshapes-global-market#:~:text=Overall%2C%20exports%20of%20U.S.%20cotton,China%20imported%209.5%20million%20bales> (accessed 06 April 2025).

<sup>151</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022:56.

9.

## Recommendation: Testing a ‘small TC’ and Collaborating on Syria’s Reconstruction

While our interviewees expressed scepticism about the prioritisation the “Türkiye Compact” would receive amidst other global crises, the TC could, in fact, be a policy tool to help better manage migration in the EU’s neighbourhood and thereby prevent policymakers from facing yet another crisis.

Based on our research, we find that the most realistic way forward for the TC would be to *start small*, with a limited list of agricultural produce that Turkey would export tariff-free to the EU rather than the comprehensive list foreseen by the UNDP’s proposal. This test version could emerge from a diplomatic process initiated by Turkey and involving the European Commission, which has the exclusive mandate to negotiate trade agreements and propose them to the European Council and Parliament for approval.

A successful conclusion and implementation of a “small TC” could then open the way for two further developments. First, it could constitute a “pilot” model for engaging the US in the adoption of the TC. Second, success with the US could in turn generate a synergy with the EU and encourage them to consider expanding the “small TC” to cover more agricultural products.

This iterative process could become a virtuous cycle, later bringing on board other countries such as Canada, which is already mentioned in the TC, as well as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, which are all traditional donor countries of humanitarian programmes for refugees around the world. Eventually, the success of the TC could then become a tested model for similar situations around the world. It could become a policy example to sustainably support refugees and their receiving communities at a time when displacement crises are multiplying globally alongside increasingly scarce funding for humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, the new context in Syria may help overcome Turkish concerns that the TC *necessarily* makes refugees more settled; a fear which would make the Turkish government less willing to own the TC in the face of public resentment. Conversely, concerns on the side of Europeans regarding who could guarantee that refugees equipped with resources and skills might not want to move on to Europe can be overcome. With these two concerns addressed by the new situation in Syria, both the EU and Turkish side ought to be in a better position to gather the political will to give the UNDP's TC proposal serious consideration.

Finally, it would be interesting to explore whether the TC can be used as part of an overall strategy to support reconstruction efforts in Syria and create a conducive environment for an increasing number of Syrian refugees to return home. Article 9 of the EU-Turkey Statement provides a possible basis for such cooperation.<sup>152</sup> However, this provision has never been invoked because of concerns, mentioned to us by several of our interlocutors in both Berlin and Brussels, to do with what such cooperation could mean in terms of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria under Assad's reign. Presumably, these concerns would not apply to the current regime, which is keen to see the return of Syrian refugees in a realistic time span, and, unlike its predecessor, has close relations with Turkey and is open to cooperating with the EU.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Article 9 of the EU-Turkey Statement provides a possible basis for such cooperation that says, "The EU and its Member States will work with Turkey in any joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria, in particular in certain areas near the Turkish border which would allow for the local population and refugees to live in areas which will be more safe.", see European Council (EC), 2016.

<sup>153</sup> "14 million Syrians will return home within 2 years': Ahmed al Sharaa", *TRT World* (online), January 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/14-million-syrians-will-return-home-within-2-years-ahmed-al-sharaa-18253074> (accessed 06 April 2025).

# Abbreviations

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| 3RP   | <i>Regional Refugee Resilience Plan</i>                                    |
| CCTE  | <i>Conditional Cash Transfer for Education</i>                             |
| CDU   | <i>Christian Democratic Union of Germany</i>                               |
| DeZIM | <i>German Centre for Integration and Migration</i>                         |
| EBA   | <i>Everything But Arms</i>   |
| EDAM  | <i>Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy</i>                              |
| EEAS  | <i>European External Action Service</i>                                    |
| EPP   | <i>European People's Party</i>   |
| ESSN  | <i>Emergency Social Safety Net</i>   |
| FRIT  | <i>Facility for Refugees in Turkey</i>                                     |
| GATT  | <i>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</i>                              |
| GCR   | <i>Global Compact on Refugees</i>  |
| GHO   | <i>Global Humanitarian Overview</i>  |
| GSP   | <i>General System of Preferences</i>                                       |
| HTS   | <i>Hayat Tahrir al Sham</i>  |
| IFEA  | <i>French Institute for Anatolian Studies</i>                              |
| IFRC  | <i>International Federation of Red Cross</i>                               |
| IKV   | <i>Economic Development Foundation</i>                                     |
| ILO   | <i>International Labour Organization</i>                                   |
| LFIP  | <i>Law on Foreigners and International Protection</i>                      |
| LSE   | <i>London School of Economics</i>  |
| MFN   | <i>Most Favoured Nation</i>  |
| MoFSP | <i>Ministry of Family and Social Policies</i>                              |
| NDICI | <i>Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument</i> |
| OCHA  | <i>Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</i>                 |
| PMM   | <i>Presidency of Migration Management</i>                                  |
| SPD   | <i>Social Democratic Party of Germany</i>                                  |
| SSN   | <i>Social Safety Net</i>   |
| SWP   | <i>German Institute for International and Security Affairs</i>             |
| TC    | <i>Türkiye Compact</i>   |
| TRC   | <i>Turkish Red Crescent</i>  |
| UNDP  | <i>United Nations Development Programme</i>                                |
| UNHCR | <i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>                       |
| WTO   | <i>World Trade Organization</i>  |

# Annex

## List of Interviews

| <b>Institution</b>  | <b>Place</b> | <b>Date</b>      | <b>Number of interviewees</b> |
|---|--------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Turkish Migration Office  | Ankara       | 15 April 2024    | 1                             |
| Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                     | Ankara       | 16 April 2024    | 2                             |
| EU Delegation to Turkey   | Ankara       | 16 April 2024    | 2                             |
| Embassy of Poland to Turkey   | Ankara       | 16 April 2024    | 2                             |
| Embassy of Switzerland to Turkey  | Ankara       | 16 April 2024    | 3                             |
| Embassy of Germany to Turkey  | Ankara       | 19 March 2024    | 1                             |
| <br>  |              |                  |                               |
| IKV   | Istanbul     | 17 July 2024     | 3                             |
| EDAM  | Istanbul     | 03 July 2024     | 1                             |
| <br>  |              |                  |                               |
| German Parliament (SPD)   | Berlin       | 22/23 April 2024 | 2                             |
| German Parliament (Greens)  | Berlin       | 22 April 2024    | 1                             |
| German Parliament (CDU)   | Berlin       | 23 April 2024    | 1                             |
| Turkey Rapporteur of the German Parliament                              | Berlin       | 22 April 2024    | 1                             |
| Former Turkey Rapporteur of the German Parliament                       | Berlin       | 23 April 2024    | 1                             |
| German Federal Chancellery  | Berlin       | 22 April 2024    | 2                             |
| German Ministry of Interior   | Berlin       | 24 April 2024    | 2                             |
| German Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                      | Berlin       | 23 April 2024    | 2                             |
| German Ministry of Economic Affairs                                     | Berlin       | 24 April 2024    | 2                             |
| German Ministry for Development   | Berlin       | 22 April 2024    | 2                             |
| Former Director of Turkey Section, German Ministry for Economic Affairs | Berlin       | 24 April 2024    | 1                             |
| German Center for Migration and Integration Research (DeZIM)            | Berlin       | 23 April 2024    | 1                             |
| German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)           | Berlin       | 24 April 2024    | 5                             |

|   |                                |                     |     |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----|
| European External Action Service (EEAS)                             | Brussels                       | 25 April 2024       | 3   |
| European Commission, DG NEAR  | Brussels                       | 25 April 2024       | 6   |
| European Commission, DG TRADE                                       | Brussels                       | 25 April 2024       | 1   |
| European Commission, DG HOME  | Brussels                       | 29 April 2024       | 1   |
| European Commission, DG AGRI  | Brussels                       | 26 April 2024       | 1   |
| European Commission, DG ECHO  | Brussels                       | 26 April 2024       | 1   |
| European Commission, DG INTPA                                       | Brussels                       | 26 April 2024       | 1   |
| Former Head of Turkey Unit, European Commission, DG NEAR            | Brussels                       | 26 April 2024       | 1   |
| European Parliament (S&D)   | Brussels                       | 29 April 2024       | 1   |
| European Policy Centre  | Brussels                       | 24 April 2024       | 6   |
| Wilfried Martens Centre   | Brussels                       | 29 April 2024       | 1   |
| TÜSIAD  | Brussels                       | 26 April 2024       | 1   |
| World Trade Organization  | Geneva                         | 01 May 2024         | 2   |
| UNHCR   | Geneva                         | 02 May 2024         | 2   |
| UNCTAD  | Geneva                         | 02 May 2024         | 2   |
| Geneva Graduate Institute   | Geneva                         | 01 May 2024         | 2   |
| Former Director of the WTO Council and Trade Negotiations Committee | Geneva                         | 09 August 2024      | 1   |
| Embassy of Turkey to Switzerland                                    | Bern                           | 30 April 2024       | 1   |
| Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs                                   | Bern                           | 30 April 2024       | 1   |
| House of Lords (Conservatives), UK Parliament                       | London                         | 01 November 2024    | 1   |
| House of Commons (Labour), UK Parliament                            | London                         | 01 November 2024    | 1   |
| UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office                     | London                         | 02 November 2024    | 1   |
| UK Trade Department   | London                         | 06 November 2024    | 1   |
| Konrad Adenauer Foundation (3x)                                     | Ankara/<br>Brussels/<br>Geneva | February–April 2024 | 2–4 |
| Heinrich Böll Foundation (2x)                                       | Istanbul/<br>Berlin            | March–April 2024    | 2   |

Total: 50

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