

Economic and social outcomes of the Irregular Migratory Flows to Turkey

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Like many other countries in Europe and in its peripheral areas, Turkey has to deal today with a growing irregular influx of foreign nationals to the country. Given its geographical position as the natural crossroads between Asia, Africa and Europe, and as a country of both destination and transit, Turkey is in the front line when it comes to dealing with irregular migration flows. Regarding the number of clandestine immigrants arriving each year, Turkey seems to be among the leading countries facing the problem of irregular migration, with records of nearly 100,000 immigrants apprehended in 2000, 2001 and 2002.

There is a constant increase in the influx of foreign nationals from the early 1990s to the first years the twenty-first century, which show figures that have risen by more than ten times during the last eight years. This increase indicates that irregular migration into Turkey is accelerating sharply, yet there seems to be a considerable decline in the period of 2002-2003. Each year, an estimated two or three hundred thousand irregular migrants enter Turkey, of which around half work illegally in the country for some time before moving on. It is estimated that less than half of these people are apprehended by the police. In the last eight years, although the major migration flows have come from Iraq, Moldova, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, significant numbers have arrived also from Romania, Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Bangladesh and

Georgia. If we consider that the migrants are heading for Europe or other more developed parts of the world, and most of the time only stay in Turkey on a temporary basis, and other new arrivals in the country are intending to settle and work for a limited period of time, we can observe that Turkey has become a country that fulfils multiple roles in the irregular migratory flows. In addition to this situation, being a country of asylum makes Turkey's position even more complicated.

An interesting feature of migration in Turkey is the diversity of the national background of the immigrants: authorities in Turkey have identified 163 nationalities arriving in the country during the past eight years. All these factors are important in explaining some of the difficulties that face the Turkish system in adapting to the circumstances in administrative, legal, financial, social, economic, and cultural terms.

Irregular migration flows into Turkey currently include three principal types of migrant. The first are migrants mostly from the former Soviet Block or Eastern European countries, such as Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation, who come to Turkey in search of work. Some of the industrial and service sectors absorb these migrant labourers: for instance, Moldovan women find employment as domestic helpers; Moldovan, Ukrainian, Romanian, and Russian women work in the sex and entertainment industries; again mostly Moldavian and Romanian women are employed in the textile industry; Iranian, Iraqi, Moldovan, and Romanian men find employment in construction work; and men and women migrant workers from various nationalities work in restaurants and other food related

sectors. Many of these migrants have initially entered Turkey legally, but subsequently overstayed their permitted time or failed to get their visa renewed.

The second form of irregular migration to Turkey concerns the migrants in transit, who arrive in Turkey mainly from the Middle East (mostly from Iran and Iraq), and from various Asian countries (such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India) and African countries (such as Morocco, Nigeria, Algeria, and Egypt, and Somalia). These migrants often target Turkey as a transit zone in their attempt to reach and enter west European countries.

The third group of irregular migrants comprises the category of rejected asylum seekers who refuse to return home and instead search for illegal jobs or further opportunities to enter another country illegally. The migrants in the second and third groups are able to find occasional employment as manual workers mostly in the construction sector, restaurants and other food related sectors, and in small workshops, and often as street vendors in big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara.

Today, experience in various countries and international settings (supranational entities like the EU and intergovernmental and international organisations such as the IOM or the ILO) provides a wealth of information, guidelines, and regulations on how to deal with the irregular migration and employment. This experience proves that enforcement of minimum migration, labour and workplace standards and regulations serves as an effective deterrent to irregular migration and employment by discouraging substandard exploitative conditions. It is

within this context that the Turkish authorities have recognised the need to establish, modernise, and improve the country's laws, policies, practices and administrative structures aimed at ensuring regular migration and employment. As has often been discussed, in the last few years this has been executed as a parallel programme to the country's candidature for accession to the EU. Turkey has been very active in its intentions to synchronise its legislation with the Community acquis. Such efforts at synchronisation are applicable in the field of irregular migration in general, and to trafficking and smuggling issues and their consequences on the labour market in particular. It is anticipated that the related migration policies and practices in Turkey will be brought into line with

the standards and norms set by the EU, as Turkey has recently taken several steps towards convergence with these standards by changing, or making provisions to change, its country's relevant laws, policies, practices, thereby consolidating its status as a long-standing and dedicated candidate of accession to the European Union. Some remarkable examples of these efforts are the following. Firstly, a new law, which adds several articles to the Penal Code and amends the law regarding the combating of benefits-oriented criminal organisations, was adopted by the Parliament on 3rd August 2002. This law introduces the definition of human trafficking and smuggling into the Turkish legal system, and prescribes heavy penalties for traffickers and smugglers. Sec-

only, the draft law regarding work permits for foreigners was approved by the Turkish Parliament on 27th February 2003. With this law, Turkey can regulate the access of migrant workers to the country's labour market. For instance, according to new rules foreigners are now permitted employment in domestic sectors that were not open to them before the new legislation. Third, the amendment to Article 5 of the citizenship legislation was approved by the Parliament on 4th June 2003. With this amendment a prohibition period of three years has been imposed on applications for citizenship. According to previous legislation, a foreign woman was able to acquire Turkish citizenship immediately after marrying a Turkish national.