

11.11.11

VECHT MEE TEGEN ONRECHT



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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

AFGHAN MIGRANTS IN TURKEY ONE YEAR AFTER THE FALL OF KABUL

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Coverpicture: An Afghan family is detained by Turkish security forces in a migrant processing centre in the border city of Van, Turkey. 2021 © REUTERS/Murad Sezer



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan has faced instability, conflict, impoverishment, drought and displacement since many years. The Taliban takeover in August 2021 has exacerbated these challenges. The Afghan economy has contracted an estimated 30 to 40 per cent in the last year. Incomes have reduced by 20 to 30 per cent. Projections indicate that poverty rates may climb as high as 97 per cent by the end of 2022. More than half of the approximately 39 million inhabitants face extreme levels of hunger. Also the human rights situation is grim. The Taliban side-lines the parliamentary process and the rule of law. The human rights situation for women and girls is particularly worrisome.

An estimated 3.5 million Afghans are internally displaced by conflict. Nearly five million Afghans are displaced outside of the country. At the same time of the worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, an increasingly hostile environment towards Afghan refugees unfolded in many countries, including neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan, EU member states and Turkey.

According to Turkish authorities, there are 182,000 registered Afghan migrants in Turkey and up to an estimated 120,000 unregistered ones. For many years, Afghan asylum seekers face obstacles to access to the asylum procedure and arbitrariness in the assessments of protection claims. The situation has only deteriorated since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Since August 2021, a registration stop for all new Afghan arrivals is in place. Since January 2022, Turkey forcefully returned more than 18.000 Afghans to Afghanistan. In this process hundreds of cases of ill-treatment and torture have been reported. The increase in forced returns since August 2021 has caused widespread panic among Afghans in Turkey.

Against this background, 11.11.11 and Upinion conducted an online survey among 110 Afghan migrants in Turkey, in the period between December 2021 and February 2022. Main findings are as follows:

- Half of those questioned fear forced repatriation
- 20% were victims of pushback at the Turkish border
- 78% indicated that they were not allowed to leave their place of residence
- 64% indicated that they could not meet their basic needs
- Borrowing money is the main source of income, more important than income from work.
- One in ten have family members under 18 who are employed
- None of those interviewed said they received financial support from the UN, NGOs or the EU
- Only 22% plan to stay in the same place for the next six months. 4% plan to return to Afghanistan. 54% want to travel to a European country.



METHODOLOGY

This report is based on an **online survey** among **110 Afghan migrants in Turkey**, conducted by online research platform Upinion. These data findings were complemented by extensive desk research and semi-structured interviews that were conducted online with stakeholders, including representatives of Turkish refugee rights organisations, staff of civil society organisations (CSOs) working with Afghan refugees in Turkey, individual Turkish and European analysts and human rights experts, and an EU official.

The survey took place between 20 December 2021 and 27 February 2022. Eligible respondents were recruited via targeted advertisements on Facebook. The conversation was published in Dari language.

Upinion's online platform allows to securely connect with people in crisis and displacement-affected countries. Its in-house developed platform permits real-time engagement with refugee communities in the same way they connect with their friends and families, using messaging apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. The way Upinion holds conversations with people also permits to send tailored information to respondents about relevant services or initiatives in their area, or to share statistics of the research, thereby turning it into an information exchange. The organization has the ISO/IEC 27001 Certification, which is the international best practice standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMSs) and follows GDPR regulations.

Respondents - Demographic information

Of the 110 respondents, 89.1% (n=98) are male, while 7.3% (n=8) are female. In Turkey, there is no accurate figure for female Afghan refugee registrations. However, according to Facebook data, 81.9 percent of Afghan Facebook users are men. This explains why there were fewer female participants in this conversation. When it comes to the province of residence in Turkey, Konya is home to 46.6% of the respondents, followed by Nevsehir (16.2%) and Karaman (8.8%). Gender distribution is similar across areas of residence. 34% of the respondents have been residing in Turkey for more than three years. 19.1% of respondents have been in Turkey between 1 and 2 years. 47% of the respondents had very recently arrived in Turkey (less than 1 year). 26% arrived only in the six months before the conduction of the survey and thus after the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan.

Given the sample size and its composition (that required internet access to participate), the survey does not allow to draw representative conclusions about the total population of Afghan migrants in Turkey. It does however allow to identify important trends. Furthermore, it shows the need to include Afghan refugees structurally in comprehensive needs assessments, in order to obtain a clear picture of their priorities, and challenges.





1. SETTING THE SCENE

1.1. RAPIDLY WORSENING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Afghanistan has faced instability, conflict, impoverishment, drought and displacement since many years. Developments over the past year have only exacerbated these challenges.

The Afghan economy has contracted with an estimated 30 to 40 per cent since August 2021. Incomes have reduced by 20 to 30 per cent. Projections indicate that poverty rates may climb as high as 97 per cent by the end of 2022. 82 per cent of households are in debt.¹

Many Afghans have long lived in extreme poverty. Even before the Taliban takeover of August 2021, an estimated **ninety percent of Afghans lived on an income of less than \$2 a day.**² The collapse of government services, after the Taliban takeover and the cutback of foreign aid, rising inflation, disease and drought have pushed many more below the poverty line. In January 2022, UN Secretary-General António Guterres raised alarm over the Afghan economy collapsing amid a brutal winter, and daily life becoming “a frozen hell”. **More than half of the approximately 39 million inhabitants are facing “extreme levels” of hunger,** Guterres added.³ In 2021, 15 million people received food assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP). According to surveys carried out by WFP in December 2021, **98 percent of Afghans are not consuming enough food,** a 17 percent rise since August 2021.⁴ Afghanistan has now the highest number of people in emergency food insecurity in the world.⁵ More than 80 percent of the population faces debt.⁶

With over 45% of the GDP, the Afghan economy (and government agencies that provide public services such as healthcare, education, energy, sanitation and food assistance) was highly **dependent on foreign aid** that has been largely halted by donors, in order not to support the Taliban regime.⁷ This in combination with a freeze of financial assets (such as the central bank reserves held in the U.S. and other countries) and a drop in remittances sent by Afghans abroad⁸, has resulted in a drastic decrease of the financial flows into the country. In response to the critical humanitarian situation, UN human rights experts have called on the US government to unblock the foreign assets of the Central Bank of Afghanistan. According to the experts, the US measures exacerbated the situation, especially for women and girls.⁹

The abrupt Taliban takeover of public institutions has created a severe governance crisis. Many civil servants and other skilled professionals have fled to other countries. The Taliban replacements often lack prior public service and civilian technical skills.¹⁰

Moreover, the **human rights** situation in the country is particularly grim. The Taliban governs by decree and side-lines the parliamentary process. According to UNHCR this new system has been characterized by uncertainty, arbitrariness and disregard for the rule of law: ‘The formal justice system is not currently functioning, while a number of reports indicate that the Taliban applies corporal punishments and the death penalty as part of the imposition of Shari’a law. A pattern of extrajudicial killings has been reported. The extent to which the Taliban intends to respect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Afghanistan remains unclear.’¹¹ Investigations by Human Rights Watch have revealed hundreds of disappearances and killings of former soldiers, police officers and intelligence workers by the Taliban.¹² The human rights situation for **women and girls** is particularly worrisome. According to Human Rights Watch, the Taliban have imposed ‘rights-violating policies that have created huge





barriers to women's and girls' health and education, curtailed freedom of movement, expression, and association, and deprived many of earned income.' Women and girls are banned from secondary and higher education.¹³ In May 2022, the Taliban government introduced a decree that ordered women in the country to cover their faces in public.¹⁴

1.2. INCREASING DISPLACEMENT

Even before the Taliban takeover Afghanistan faced enormous numbers of displacement. The large majority are displaced inside Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries.

An estimated 3.5 million Afghans are **internally displaced** by conflict, including 702,000 persons who have been newly displaced since the beginning of 2021.¹⁵

Nearly five million Afghans are displaced outside of the country. Of these, **90% are hosted by Pakistan and Iran**. Iran hosts 780,000 registered refugees Afghans. Additionally, it is estimated that some 2 million undocumented Afghans and nearly 600,000 registered Afghan-passport holders live in Iran.¹⁶ Pakistan hosts more than 1.4 million registered Afghans.¹⁷ 2021 saw a record number of persons fleeing Afghanistan. From October 2020 through the end of January 2021 alone, more than a million Afghans in southwestern Afghanistan alone crossed into Iran.¹⁸ According to the Iranian government between 4,000 and 5,000 Afghans enter the country each day.¹⁹

Many Afghans have been **evacuated** after the Taliban took control of the country. More than 76,000 Afghans were **admitted** to the **U.S.**²⁰ **EU Member States** together evacuated a total of 22,000 Afghans.²¹ However, thousands more were left behind including many who were employed by Western governments and non-governmental organizations and who may now find themselves targeted by the Taliban.

A relatively small proportion of Afghans displaced have sought protection in the European Union. Afghans have been in the top of asylum claims in the European Union since many years, and the Taliban takeover caused an increase in asylum claims. In 2021, 97,800 Afghans lodged asylum applications in the EU, twice as many compared to 2020. Since August 2021, EU countries received more than 10,000 Afghan applications every month, more than any other nationality. However, overall in 2021, Syrians still lodged more applications (106,000) than Afghans.²² In 2021 Afghans were the largest group among all sea arrivals to Greece (20%).²³



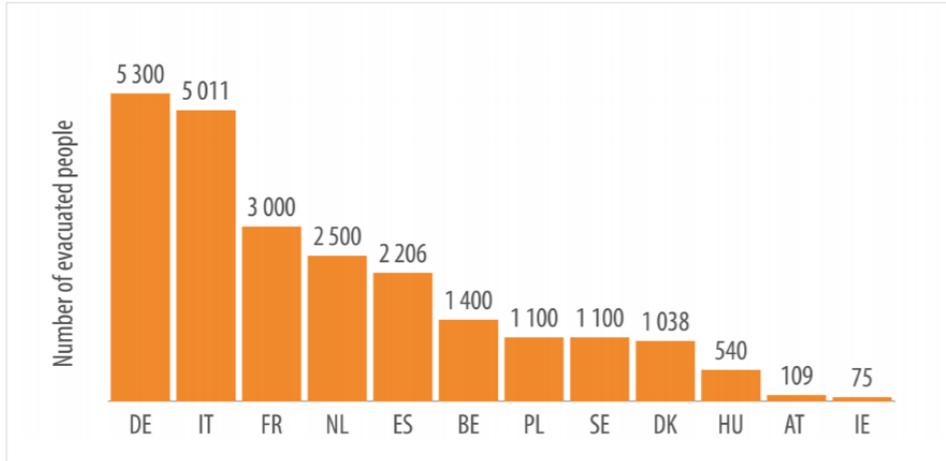


FIGURE 1: Number of Evacuated People

Source: see [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPR_BRI\(2021\)698776_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPR_BRI(2021)698776_EN.pdf)

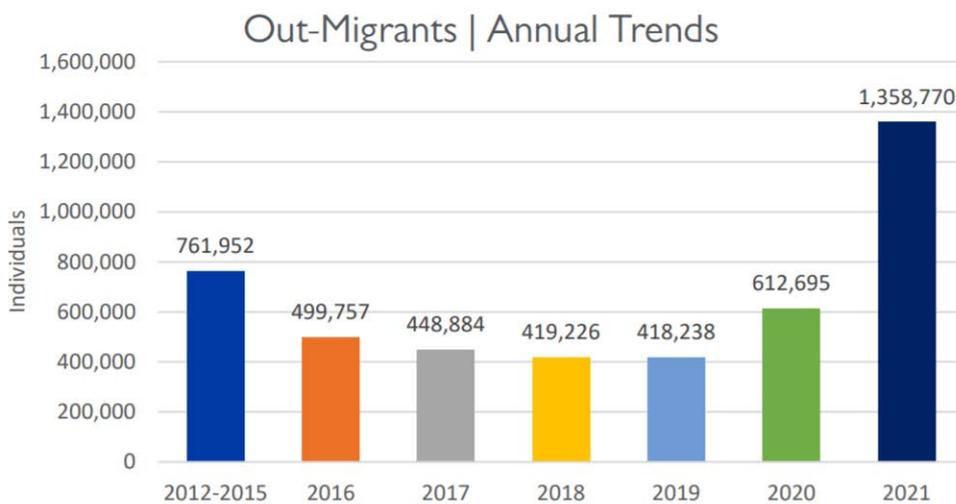


FIGURE 2: Out-Migrants, Annual Trends

Out-Migrants are Afghans who have moved or fled abroad from the assessed location, regardless the reason or duration of expatriation. This category includes refugees, displaced and uprooted people, and economic migrants who have left Afghanistan. 2021 saw a significant surge in out-migrants, increasing 122% compared to the previous year. Graph IOM Baseline Mobility Assessment

Source: see https://displacement.iom.int/dtm_download_track/17595?file=1&type=node&mpid=13412

High additional numbers of people fleeing Afghanistan should be expected because of the worsening humanitarian crisis, the economic meltdown and persistent insecurity. The prospect of long-term Taliban governance, including restrictions on girls and women and fears of retribution, has only added to the urgency.²⁴ Gallup surveys in August and September 2021 showed the **percentage of Afghans who said they wanted to leave their homeland for good** surged to a **record-high 53%**, one of the highest percentages in the world. Turkey is the most preferred destination for potential migrants from Afghanistan. 25% said they would like to move there.²⁵



In 2012, UNHCR launched the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), in collaboration with the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The strategy aims to facilitate voluntary repatriation, enable sustainable reintegration and assist host countries and communities. It is based on three pillars:

- Creating conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation
- livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan in order to facilitate sustainable return and reintegration
- Enhanced support for refugee hosting communities, preserving protection space in host countries and resettlement in third countries.

1.3. PUSHBACKS AND PRESSURE TO RETURN

At the same time of the worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, an increasingly hostile environment towards Afghan refugees has unfolded in many countries, including EU member states, with increased forced returns and pushbacks of Afghan nationals taking place. This despite a UNHCR non-return advisory (August 2021) for Afghanistan, calling for a halt on forced returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected.²⁶

Both **Pakistan** and **Iran** have stepped up deportations after the Taliban takeover, warning that they could not handle an influx of migrants and refugees. Overall, in 2021 1.170.494 undocumented Afghans returned, with 1.150.004 from Iran and 20.490 from Pakistan.²⁷

Reports of violence are widespread.²⁸ Also **Turkey** stepped up returns to Afghanistan (see 4.3).

In February 2022, UNHCR raised alarm about the “increasing number of incidents of violence, serious human rights violations against refugees and migrants and pushbacks at the external borders of the **European Union**.”²⁹ Many of the people that are victim of these violations are Afghan citizens. According to some NGO reports, Afghans represent up to 40% of the victims of EU member state pushbacks.³⁰

Just before the fall of the Afghan government, also a number of EU members states increased pressure on returns towards the country. In a letter dated 5 August 2021, the interior ministers of **Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands** urged the European Commission to continue forced returns to Afghanistan. A call that came in reaction to a demand by the Afghan government to suspend “non-voluntary returns” for three months because of the Taliban offensive. Although the latter appeal was positively met by Sweden and Finland, who halted forced returns, other member states made clear their dissatisfaction. “We would like to highlight the urgent need to perform returns, both voluntary and non-voluntary, to Afghanistan,” the six EU ministers wrote to the commission. Stopping returns would send “the wrong signal and motivate even more Afghan citizens to leave their home for the EU,” they added.³¹

In the aftermath of the Taliban take-over, debates about protection needs of Afghans arose in some member states. In **Belgium**, the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless





Persons (CGRS), the agency that takes decisions on whether to grant or refuse protection status, decided (March 2022) that it would no longer grant the subsidiary protection status to Afghan protection seekers, claiming that 'information about the situation in Afghanistan was once again available and that there was no longer a real risk of falling victim to indiscriminate violence'. A decision criticized by human rights and refugee organizations referring to the widespread and arbitrary detention and executions taking place all over the country.³²

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) maintains the position **that conditions in Afghanistan are not conducive for any type of return**.³³ Also **UNHCR** made it clear that protection needs are high and discussions about return premature. In a guidance note (February 2022) the UN agency raised concern about an **'increase in the need for international protection for people fleeing Afghanistan'**. UNHCR stressed that all claims of nationals and former habitual residents of Afghanistan seeking international protection should be processed in fair and efficient procedures in accordance with international and regional refugee law. In view of the volatility of the situation throughout Afghanistan, UNHCR does not consider it appropriate to deny international protection to Afghans and former habitual residents of Afghanistan on the basis of an internal flight or relocation alternative.³⁴

The **prospects of returnees** are bleak. According to a survey by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) among returnees (June 2021), 41% of all respondents reported that they were planning to again flee Afghanistan, either to their previous country of migration (29%), or to another country (12%). 29% reported that they had not yet decided about their future migration intentions, with **only 30% reporting that they intended to stay in Afghanistan**.³⁵

Earlier research by Norwegian Refugee Council (2018) indicated that up to 72% of Afghans returned to Afghanistan saw themselves forced to flee again (many up to three times), posing serious questions about the sustainability of returns to the country.³⁶



2. AFGHAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees in the world. The country currently hosts some 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees, along with approximately 320,000 persons of concern to UNHCR from other nationalities. The majority of those are Afghans. Although the Afghan refugee community in Afghanistan is **sizeable, it is little-known**. Most research has so far focused on the much larger group of Syrians present in the country.

In October 2018 UNHCR reported that of the 370,932 registered asylum seekers in Turkey, 46 per cent (around **170,600 individuals**) were from Afghanistan.³⁷ There are no newer figures from UNHCR as the agency stopped registering refugees by the end of 2018 and handed the process over to the Turkish government. A shift that has reduced the transparency over Afghan presence in Turkey. Turkish authorities say there are 182,000 registered Afghan migrants in Turkey and up to an estimated 120,000 unregistered ones.³⁸ Other estimations also point in the direction of several hundred thousand Afghan people present in Turkey.³⁹ In Istanbul province alone, IOM research indicates the presence of more than 127,000 Afghans.⁴⁰



2.1. EVOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE IN TURKEY

Since 2018, the Turkish **economy** has been characterized by high levels of inflation, a rapid depreciation of the Turkish lira, a sharp rise in poverty, a widening current account deficit, and a depletion of external reserves. In March 2019, the ruling AK party of Turkish President Erdogan suffered a historic loss to the opposition, and lost **political** control over major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Antalya. Erdogan is under increasing domestic pressure to take a tougher stance on the refugee issue, with general elections scheduled in 2023 and with Turkey's main opposition party (the Republican People's Party, CHP) increasingly campaigning on an anti-refugee platform.

The prospect of a new large-scale movement of refugees into Turkey, following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, has further **reinforced the unreceptive mood** among many Turkish citizens. In response to calls by European leaders to expand the scope of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement towards Afghans, Erdogan stated that there is an "unease" among Turkish public opinion with the presence of large number of refugees, and that "Turkey has no duty, responsibility or obligation to be Europe's refugee warehouse".⁴¹

President Erdogan in February 2020 announced that Turkey would open its borders with Greece. "We can't handle a new wave of migration", Erdogan stated, adding that "The European Union has to keep its promises. We are not obliged to look after and feed so many refugees." After Erdogan's statement, approximately 13,000 migrants travelled to the **border between Greece and Turkey**, often with the direct support of Turkish security forces, leading to sharp criticism of the weaponization of the refugee issue by Turkey. The Greek authorities responded by using teargas and stun grenades against refugees and pushing people back to Turkey. Greece also suspended asylum applications for one month. European commission president, Ursula von der Leyen thanked Greece for "being our European shield".⁴² The **majority** were not Syrians but **young Afghan men**, some with families. The people at the border reported grim accounts of their lives in Turkey, with no access to work.⁴³



2.2. EVOLUTION OF THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE IN TURKEY

Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, but maintains a geographical reservation that does not grant refugee status to non-Europeans. However, in 2013 a law (Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)) was adopted, that introduced the basis of the legislation on asylum and migration. The law entered into force in 2014. The LFIP introduced the concept of "**international protection**" and "**temporary protection**" (providing people in both categories with access to most government services). Refugees from Syria fall under the temporary protection regime, which grants beneficiaries a right of legal stay as well as some level of access to basic rights and services. Refugees from other non-EU countries can apply for international protection. The law also created a "Directorate General of Migration Management" (DGMM) within the Ministry of Interior. In October 2021, DGMM was re-named into the "Presidency for Migration Management" (PMM).⁴⁴

Since 2014, DGMM/PMM has put in place a network of provincial migration management offices and taken up the responsibility for refugee status determination. Towards the end of



2018 **UNHCR phased out** its registration of international protection applicants and other protection related activities. Since then, UNHCR's role is largely limited to technical and operational support.⁴⁵

This takeover of the process by DGMM/PMM has resulted in **obstacles to access to the asylum procedure and arbitrariness** in the assessments of protection claims. According to the European Council for Refugees (ECRE), the **main public policy seems to be to leave people unregistered and subsequently push them to leave Turkey, especially with regards to Afghan people.**⁴⁶ In the Strategic Mid Term observation of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the European Commission also shared a growing concern over a dramatic drop in registrations of non-Syrians and arbitrariness in the assessments, clearly disadvantaging Afghans most.⁴⁷

Even if they manage to register, Afghans in Turkey encounter significant problems. In 2020, there were **long waiting periods for an appointment, inadequate assessments of applications and automatic rejections of applications with no access to social support.** The quality of interviews is low. Interviews do not depend on credible country of origin information. Vulnerabilities were often not considered. There is **a lack of interpreters** and a lack of legal documents translated into Dari or Pashtun languages. The number of female interpreters remains particularly low. Claims relating to sexual orientation or gender identity were not addressed with the necessary sensitivity. **Afghans' applications for international protection seemed to be rejected by default.**⁴⁸

The situation has only deteriorated since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Since August 2021 there is a **registration stop for all new Afghan arrivals.** Most Afghans are apprehended at the border and immediately pushed back to Iran, including persons with a clear risk of persecution.⁴⁹



2.3. PUSHBACKS AND FORCED RETURNS

In January 2022, Turkey was the second country, after Pakistan, to resume direct flights to Afghanistan. Since then, 79 Turkish chartered **deportation flights** have landed at Kabul international airport, carrying **more than 18,000 Afghans**, according to Turkish officials and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).⁵⁰

The most common route for Afghan migrants into Turkey is via the eastern province of Van, which borders Iran. Increasing numbers of arrivals through the Iranian border have led to **restrictive measures and arbitrary detention and deportation practices**, with mainly single Afghan men being issued deportation forms. Turkey has constructed a 144 km wall on its Iranian border and Turkish authorities plan to add another 64 km. "Our biggest hope is that there is no migrant wave from Afghanistan" governor of the eastern border province of Van, Mehmet Emin Bilmez told Reuters.⁵¹ According to PMM statistics, Afghanistan was the top nationality of persons apprehended for irregular migration in 2020, with 50,161 out of a total of 122,302 apprehended persons.⁵²

Media⁵³ and NGOs have reported extensively on pushbacks at the Turkey-Iran border. In October 2021 Human Rights Watch reported that Turkish authorities have been summarily and violently pushing back Afghan asylum seekers back to Iran, in violation of international law.⁵⁴



Reports that returnees were given wrong or fraudulent information to **make them sign voluntary return documents** are widespread. In most cases, signatures are taken without the presence of a lawyer. Several reports point to the lack of access of the UNHCR and NGOs to Turkish detention and removal centres, which calls into question the UNHCR's capacity to verify that return movements were indeed voluntary.⁵⁵ These practices are not limited to the border areas. In April 2022, the Izmir Bar Association reported that about 100 Afghan migrants had been subjected to torture and ill-treatment and forced to sign "voluntary repatriation documents" in Izmir Repatriation Centre. The report was based on interviews with people residing in the centre.⁵⁶

Observers have reported poor conditions in Turkish detention centres, in addition to persistent overcrowding, lack of medical care, and failure to provide detainees access to legal assistance.⁵⁷ In the removal centre in Van, there are leaflets and **advertisements on voluntary return but no information about international protection or legal aid**. Lawyers thus assume that the system is return-oriented. Clients have been deported even after lodging an appeal.⁵⁸

Legislative changes enacted on 24th December 2019 have also placed increased pressure specifically on non-Syrians, including a change **to the LFIP, which shortens the appeal period prior to deportation from 15 to 7 days – rendering it almost impossible for asylum-seekers facing a removal order to obtain legal assistance**.

Persons that are detained are not allowed to be in contact with relatives or lawyers. Relatives are left with no information about their whereabouts. It can take several weeks or even months until they hear from them. The increase in forced returns since August 2021 has caused widespread panic among Afghans in Turkey. The police is searching everywhere, including work places. High numbers of people are hiding. They are afraid to be on the streets and in other public places.⁵⁹

Afghan people face **protection risks** at nearly every stage of their migration, but border areas present specific risks. Research by Mixed Migration Center (MMC) with Afghan migrants in Turkey points to Van as the most dangerous city in Turkey. Physical violence (41%), detention (33%), death (31%) robbery (27%) and injury/ill-health from harsh conditions (26%) were reported as the main risks faced by Afghans. 44% of respondents reported smugglers as the most common perpetrators of protection incidents. This is followed by **border guards/immigration officials (35%), military/police (34%)** and criminal gangs (28%). Among respondents traveling with children 70% reported a high or very high **likelihood of children facing protection risks** en route, including death (49%), injury/ill health from harsh conditions (44%) and physical violence (40%).⁶⁰

In July 2022, a four-year-old Afghan boy was fatally shot in the eastern Turkish province of Van when Turkish security forces fired at a vehicle carrying a group of migrants.⁶¹





3. EU ENGAGEMENT

3.1. THE FACILITY FOR REFUGEES IN TURKEY (FRIT)

In November 2015 the EU set up the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT). It is not a fund in itself, rather a coordination mechanism for the mobilisation of resources from both the EU budget and from EU member states. Between 2015 and 2021 two tranches of 3 billion Euro have been allocated: a first tranche of 3 billion Euro (1 billion from the EU budget, 2 billion from EU member states) with an implementation deadline of 2021, a second tranche of 3 billion (1 billion from EU member states, 2 billion from the EU budget) with an implementation deadline of 2025. Projects funded by the FRIT are both humanitarian and structural in nature. Main sectors that were funded under the first tranche are socio-economic support, education, health and protection, while a limited number of “migration management” projects have also been funded.

Although non-Syrians are included in the FRIT mandate, most refugee programmes in Turkey are designed to support Syrians. As a result, the information and services available to non-Syrians are (even) more limited. The fact that funds and projects in Turkey are mostly Syrian-centred is also reflected in a low number of NGOs specifically working on and for Afghan refugees.⁶²

The **European Court of Auditors** criticized the fact that the **FRIT did not address the needs of the non-Syrian refugee population** (mainly Afghans and Iraqis) which ‘was not in line with the stated aim of the Facility to address the needs of all refugees.’⁶³

Research by Mixed Migration Center (MMC) among Afghan migrants residing in Turkey points out a **lack of assistance**. Most respondents (73%) reported that they had not received any assistance en route to and through Turkey. Younger respondents reported less access to assistance than older ones. Only 21% of those between 18 and 30 received assistance such as food, temporary shelter and medical assistance. Among those who received assistance, nearly half received it from the local population/volunteers (44%), followed by fellow migrants (37%) and smugglers (36%). **Only 2% mentioned having received assistance from UN agencies and NGOs.**⁶⁴

3.2. RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state, that has agreed to admit and grant them permanent residence. Through resettlement international protection can be granted to refugees whose life, liberty, security, health or other fundamental rights are threatened in the country in which they have sought refuge. It is also a tool to show solidarity with countries receiving large numbers of refugees.

Numbers of resettlement of Afghan persons from Turkey to third countries have been extremely low.⁶⁵ Countries that offer places for resettlement to Afghans in Turkey are mainly the US and to a lesser extent Canada. Whereas EU member states have offered a considerable number of resettlement places for Syrians in Turkey since 2015, **only 46 Afghan refugees from Turkey have been resettled to the EU in the last 7 years.**



Year ↓ ¹ / ₈	Country of Origin ↓ ^A / ₂	Country of Asylum ↓ ^A / ₂	Persons ↓ ¹ / ₈
2015	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	477
2016	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	495
2017	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	213
2018	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	170
2019	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	1,195
2020	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	222
2021	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	912
2022	Afghanistan (AFG)	Türkiye (TUR)	306

FIGURE 3: Total number of Afghan refugees resettled from Turkey to third countries 2015-July 2022.



3.3. EU INVOLVEMENT IN FORCED RETURNS

The EU support of migration management in Turkey poses serious risks to complicity in human rights abuses. According to the most recent FRIT annual progress report, two “migration management” projects have been funded under the first tranche (2016-2017), for an overall amount of 80 million Euro. A first project (20 million Euro) was aimed at “enhancing the capacity of the Turkish Coast Guard to carry out search and rescue operations”, while a second project (60 million 24 11. paper Euro) provided direct support to the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (now PMM) for its management of removal centres. Both projects have been completed by the end of 2019.

Investigations by the Global Detention Project (GDP) have highlighted that forced returns took place in removal centres that have received financial support from the EU’s Facility for Refugees in Turkey. NGOs and media have reported on violent behaviour by the Turkish coast guard. The Global Detention Project, in a report issued in October 2021, has been scathing about the continued involvement of the EU in the detention (and subsequent return) of refugees and asylum-seekers. EU support has bolstered the number and capacity of detention facilities, or removal centres. Indeed, in 2018, the country’s detention capacity in removal centres doubled. Six facilities originally intended for reception of international protection applicants, made possible through EU funding, were later “re-purposed to serve as removal centres” after the EU-Turkey Action Plan on Migration and EU-Turkey deal. Seven facilities are also planned to open with EU support (the Directorate General for Migration



Management's (DGMM) website refers to them as "EU project centres").

Risks of EU complicity in human rights abuses are likely to increase in the future as the EU is increasing its focus on migration management in new financial support packages. In December 2021, the European Commission announced the allocation of 30 million Euro for "measures to support migration and border management", including the "management of reception and hosting centres" and the "continuation of EU direct support to the Presidency for Migration Management (PMM)." As stated by European Commissioner Varhelyi, this money will be used to "provide financing to the authorities to address migratory challenges and increase border protection, not least in view of the evolving situation at the Eastern border of Turkey".⁶⁶

4. AFGHAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY: SURVEY DATA FINDINGS

4.1. PRESSURE TO RETURN

Answers to the survey indicate to a growing pressure on Afghan migrants in Turkey to return, with a high prevalence of pushbacks and deportation attempts.

- When asked "Do you think there is increasing pressure by the Turkish authorities on Afghans to leave Turkey, in the past 3 to 6 months?", the vast majority of Afghan respondents indicated that there is an increasing pressure on them from Turkish authorities. Only 11% of respondents answered negatively to this question. The pressure on Afghans takes various forms:
 - 9% of respondents report physical violence
 - 8% report raids and arbitrary arrests
 - 16% report denial of services like healthcare and education
- 49% of the Afghan respondents fear deportation.
 - 20% experienced border pushbacks firsthand
 - 15% have experienced deportation attempts.

Several persons testified of these forced deportation attempts, including via signing forced voluntary return documents and physical violence.

"I have been in Turkey for two months. The Turkish police was waiting at the border. They sent us to Iran twice, and they took us from the city by beating and torturing us."

- Afghan male respondent

4.2. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

When asked: "Do you face any movement restrictions in Turkey (i.e. to travel to other regions if you want to)?", the vast majority of Afghan respondents (78%) reported not being allowed



to leave their area of residency.

Applicants for international protection are assigned to a province, where they have to register and stay there as long as they are subject to international protection, including after obtaining status. Applicants have an obligation to reside in a specific address, as well as reporting duties. International protection applicants who do not report in time or are not present in their registered address upon three consecutive checks by the authorities are considered to have implicitly withdrawn their international protection application. Non-compliance may have very serious consequences such as administrative detention in a Removal Centre. Afghan applicants often face stricter treatment than other groups. For people that have not been able to register (de facto the majority of Afghans that arrived after August 2021), the situation is even more difficult. After legislative changes in December 2019, the law foresees an administrative fine for those who provide accommodation to unregistered foreigners, even unknowingly.⁶⁷

4.3. EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

Survey answers indicate an alarming economic situation.

- A majority of 64% of respondents reported that they are not able to cover basic household necessities and needs.
- When asked “What is currently your main source of income?”, borrowing money is the most important (43%),
 - Relatively more women (57%) stated that they borrowed money or received financial support from relatives at home as their main source of income. None of the women in this survey are working, nor do they have savings.⁶⁸
 - 13% of respondents ‘receive financial support from relatives in their home country’
 - 9% have ‘family members under the age of 18 who are working’.
 - None of the participants chose options such as receiving cash support from the UN or NGOs, receiving cash from the European Union (ESSN program), or accepting cash assistance from religious institutions.
- The biggest challenges regarding their livelihoods facing our respondents is ‘not having a work permit’ (66%)
- 22% of respondents reduces the number of meals or portion size of meals as a strategy to cope with a lack of food or money to buy food”. More women relied on reducing the portion size of meals, (57%) compared to men (16%).

These results come as no surprise given the fact that applicants for international protection in Turkey face widespread undeclared employment and labour exploitation. In 2019 a total of only 1,466 work permits were issued to citizens of Afghanistan. More recent figures are not available.⁶⁹ A Mixed Migration Center survey among 341 Afghans in Turkey in 2020 indicated that 73% face problems in employment. Most participants are only able to find day jobs in construction, sheepherding, factories, and textile workshops.⁷⁰



4.4. HEALTHCARE

Since late 2019, non-Syrian refugees do not qualify for free health care after a year in the country (with some exceptions for the most vulnerable). When it comes to access to health-care, our data findings suggest important obstacles.

- Almost half of the Afghan respondents (45%) were denied access due to lack of documents, such as ID card and/or residency card, followed by lack of financial means (24%).
- Only 22% of the Afghan respondents were not denied access to healthcare services when they needed them.

4.5. PROSPECT (RETURN/RESETTLEMENT)

When respondents were asked if they plan to stay in the same place the following six months:

- 54% wish to travel to a European country
- Only 22% of respondents indicated a wish to stay in the same place
- 9% is planning to move to a different area in Turkey
- 4% plan to return to Afghanistan

41% of the respondents knew someone who had returned to Afghanistan. But asked if respondents knew “people who returned from Turkey back to Afghanistan, but then decided to flee Afghanistan again” 39% of respondents responded to this question affirmatively.

This highlights the precarious, unsustainable character of returns to Afghanistan, in line with other research.⁷¹

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EU AND MEMBER STATES

IN TURKEY/IN RELATION TO TURKISH GOVERNMENT

- Publicly **call on the Turkish** government to put an immediate **end** to any **forced return**, either directly or indirectly, of Afghan refugees.
- Put in place an **independent investigation** into allegations that EU-funded “**removal centres**” across Turkey have been used to force Afghan refugees to sign “voluntary return” forms, before being returned to Afghanistan and other countries.
- Demand immediate, full and **unhindered access of the UNHCR** and other independent observers to Turkish detention and removal centres, in order to verify the voluntary nature of return movements. Make any **EU funding** for Turkish “removal centres” **conditional** on full and unhindered access of UNHCR monitoring staff and other independent observers.
- Take an active **leadership** role - within national, European and international fora - in the development and implementation of a comprehensive and more ambitious strategy and response to the Afghan refugee crisis, which is based on the UNHCR framework of “**durable solutions**” for international refugee crises.
- Scale up the **humanitarian support and the access to social services** for Afghan and other asylum seekers in Turkey. In particular, scale up the response near border areas and in particular in and around the city of Van (Turkey), where respondents report a high prevalence of protection incidents combined with a lack of available assistance and support.
- Provide **support** and a platform to **Afghan civil society organizations**/ community-based organizations, which are instrumental in obtaining contextual information on the needs and priorities of Afghan refugees, in doing outreach and providing assistance and legal counselling to Afghan refugees, and to represent Afghan voices to the larger humanitarian system, donors, policy makers, and the larger public.
- Systematically **include local CSO actors and Afghan refugees** in the design, planning, coordination, implementation and evaluation of international cooperation interventions.
- Advocate and support for **registration** of Afghan and other asylum seekers and access to basic services and employment outside their province of registration.
- Support **legal aid services** that are accessible to Afghan and other asylum seekers in Turkey, such as legal clinics that can provide advice concerning detention, deportation and international protection.
- Accelerate efforts to put in place an objective **assessment**, including a **human rights** impact assessment, of the **EU-Turkey Statement** and of cooperation on refugees, asylum seekers and migration (as requested by the European Parliament in May 2021). EU



support to migration management in Turkey should be closely monitored from a human rights and do-no-harm perspective.

IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Uphold the **right to apply for asylum**, including the right to **reception** of applicants and **halt forced returns** to Afghanistan in line with the UNHCR non-return advisory.
- Immediately put an **end to violations of the principle of non-refoulement**, including **push backs** on all Mediterranean sea routes, and on land routes to Europe. Increase search and rescue capacity in the Mediterranean and provide predictable ports of safety to allow swift disembarkation of people rescued at sea.
- Increase **resettlement** numbers and other safe and formal routes to Europe for refugees from Afghanistan; commit to improved responsibility-sharing between member states.
- As part of ongoing negotiations on a new EU Pact on Asylum and Migration, support the creation of an **independent mechanism that monitors** effective access to EU asylum procedures, respect for **fundamental rights** and respect for the principle of non-refoulement at the **EU's borders**; and ensure that any such process is truly independent from national authorities, and well-resourced. In case of violations, the European Commission must be able to take effective measures to ensure accountability for rights violations.

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