

The Refugee Card in EU-Turkey Relations: A Necessary but Uncertain Deal

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Abstract

Now in its fifth year, the war in Syria has triggered the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time. For most refugees, Turkey is the main transit country to reach Europe, where they hope for a better life. However, Europe has not yet been able to provide a long-term sustainable response to the current refugee situation. Meanwhile, Turkey has become the largest refugee-hosting country in the world with over 2.7 million refugees. As this paper argues, the EU and Turkey need each other in handling the refugee crisis. A failure to cooperate will put the future of hundreds of thousands of Syrians refugees on hold and have irreversible consequences for EU-Turkey relations.

Introduction

The migration crisis is not only shaking the very foundations of the European Union – tolerance, unity and solidarity – but also its relations with Turkey, established more than half a century ago. An unprecedented rapprochement has taken place as a result of Turkey’s cooperation with the EU in containing irregular migration flows towards Europe. It remains to be seen whether this renewed interest is based on a transactional approach or a true commitment to strengthening their partnership.

Started more than five years ago, the Syrian war has sparked the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time. Nearly five million people have fled Syria since 2011 seeking safety in neighbouring countries and millions more are internally displaced. Turkey has been on the front line of the Syrian refugee crisis and has made commendable efforts to provide humanitarian aid and support for the Syrian people in the country. Turkey hosts over 2.7 million refugees, more than any other country, proudly bearing the title of the largest refugee-hosting country in the world.

By contrast, the EU has so far been unable to provide a collective response to the challenges posed by the migration crisis as divisions on how to deal with the influx of refugees have emerged within Member States. After a wave of migrants arrived in Europe in the summer of 2015, the EU turned to Turkey in a desperate effort to stem the flow of refugees. As the deal is not legally binding its success will largely depend on the readiness of the two sides to live up to their commitments.

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In the first part of this paper I will analyse the nature, components and feasibility of the deal, underlining the main inconsistencies with international law. The second part discusses the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in settling and integrating in Turkey and provides recommendations to improve their living standards. EU support is essential to give Syrians the prospect of a better life in Turkey.

1. The EU-Turkey Migration Deal: Facts and Figures

On 29 November 2015, the EU and Turkey agreed on a Joint Action Plan to bring order into migratory flows and help to stem irregular migration.¹ In exchange, the EU committed to: a) re-energise Turkey's accession process by establishing a structured and more frequent high-level dialogue with Turkey and opening new negotiation chapters;² b) accelerate the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens in the Schengen zone by October 2016; and c) provide an initial 3 billion euros to improve the situation of Syrians in Turkey.

As a follow-up to the November 2015 summit with Turkey, the EU leaders met again in March 2016 to discuss the implementation of the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. Despite encouraging signs of progress, the number of illegal entries from Turkey remained too high. On 7 March, Turkey agreed to accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece, and to take back all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters starting from 20 March.³ A 1:1 system was established to resettle, for every Syrian readmitted by Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian from Turkey to the EU Member States. These two elements constitute the cornerstones of the agreement reached between the EU and Turkey on 18 March 2016.⁴ In return for Turkey's strengthened commitment, the EU decided to bring forward the visa liberalisation deadline to the end of June 2016 and to mobilise an additional 3 billion euros in funding up to the end of 2018 under the Facility for Refugees.

The second report on implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, adopted in June 2016, shows that, despite delivering some results, the progress achieved so far

1 European Council, *Meeting of Heads of State or Government with Turkey - EU-Turkey Statement*, 29 November 2015, <http://europa.eu/!ff74HB>.

2 Of the 35 negotiation chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, only 15 have been opened and just one has been provisionally closed since accession talks started in 2005. Two chapters have been recently opened under the terms of the agreement: chapter 17, on Economic and Monetary Policy, and chapter 33, on Financial and Budgetary Provisions.

3 European Council, *Statement of the EU Heads of State or Government*, 7 March 2016, <http://europa.eu/!Pf98uF>.

4 European Council, *EU-Turkey Statement*, 18 March 2016, <http://europa.eu/!Uv88TM>.

remains delicate.⁵ One of the most notable results has been the sharp decrease in the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers crossing from Turkey into Greece. In the month before the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, around 1,740 migrants were crossing the Aegean Sea to the Greek islands every day.⁶ Since 1 May, the average daily number of arrivals has gone down to 47.⁷ The number of lives lost in the Aegean Sea has also dropped significantly. After the sealing of the Balkan corridor, fewer asylum seekers have been risking the journey to Greece as the likelihood of transiting to other European countries has almost vanished.

Since 20 April, 462 persons who entered irregularly after the 20 March Statement have been returned from Greece to Turkey.⁸ Under the terms of the deal, migrant returns will only be carried out for those migrants who do not apply for asylum or whose application has been determined to be unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive. However, leading international NGOs have claimed that the returns carried out under the March Statement have violated the EU principles guaranteeing the right to seek asylum. Human Rights Watch (HRW) research has revealed that the first round of EU-sanctioned deportations of 66 people from the Greek island of Chios to Turkey on 4 April 2016 violated the rights of those deported.⁹ According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 13 of those deported from Chios had expressed a desire to seek asylum in Greece.¹⁰ HRW says that number could be higher. These revelations have questioned the Statement's premise that people who apply for asylum in Greece will have their applications treated "on a case by case basis, in line with EU and international law,"¹¹ "thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion."¹² It remains unclear whether what occurred in the case of these 13 individuals was an isolated mistake or part of a more common practice.

Similarly, in early June, a Greek appeals committee decided not to send to Turkey nine Syrian refugees facing

5 European Commission, *Second Report on the Progress Made in the Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement (COM/2016/0349)*, 15 June 2016, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0349>.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

9 Human Rights Watch, *EU/Greece: First Turkey Deportations Riddled with Abuse*, 19 April 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/node/288965>.

10 Patrick Kingsley, "Greece May Have Deported Asylum Seekers by Mistake, Says UN", in *The Guardian*, 5 April 2016, <https://gu.com/p/4t4qc/stw>.

11 European Commission, *Turkey Agreement: Questions and Answers*, 19 March 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-963_en.htm.

12 European Council, *EU-Turkey Statement*, *cit.*

deportation.¹³ The Administrative Appeals Committee of Lesbos has issued 10 decisions stating that Turkey is not safe enough to return Syrian refugees to, as Turkey is believed to have violated the *non-refoulement* principle¹⁴ in light of evidence suggesting brutal rejection of Syrian refugees at the border and mass deportations to Syria,¹⁵ along with the fact that the temporary protection regime offered to Syrian nationals falls short of the legal guarantees offered by the Geneva Convention on refugees.

In light of all the above, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has expressed concern over the deal, raising doubts about its consistency with international law.¹⁶

1.1 Relocation and Resettlement:¹⁷ Europe's Achilles Heel

Before the deal with Turkey was struck, in two Council Decisions adopted in 2015, EU Member States committed to relocate 160,000 people from Greece and Italy, the countries where the majority of migrants have been arriving.¹⁸ On 20 July of that same year, Member States also agreed to resettle 22,504 persons in clear need of international protection.¹⁹ Under the EU-Turkey Statement, the Commission adopted a proposal on 21 March to make 54,000 places not yet allocated, out of the 160,000 places foreseen for relocations, available for the purpose of resettling Syrians from Turkey to the EU. However, after one year of implementation, the refugee relocation scheme is hardly working and the resettlement programme is progressing very slowly.

In the course of 2016, 1,546 irregular migrants have been returned from Greece to Turkey in total.²⁰ Since 4 April 2016, 802 Syrians have been resettled from Turkey to the

EU under the 1:1 mechanism.²¹ This mechanism will take place, in the first instance, by honouring the commitments agreed by the Member States in the Council meeting of 20 July 2015 to resettle 22,504 refugees in 2015-16. However, so far only 8,268 people have been resettled since the launch of the scheme (see Table 1 in the Annexes).

Once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ending or at least have been substantially reduced, a humanitarian admission scheme for Syrian refugees currently in Turkey will be activated, to which EU Member States will contribute on a voluntary basis.²²

On the other hand, most Member States have failed so far to fulfil their obligations with regard to urgent relocation measures.²³ By 11 July, only 3,056 persons (2,213 from Greece and 843 from Italy), out of 160,000, have been relocated (see Table 2 in the Annexes).

At the same time, it is still largely the same Member States that have continued to increase their relocation efforts. Four Member States (Austria, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) have not relocated a single applicant; six (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Sweden) have relocated only 1 per cent of their allocation; and only five Member States (Cyprus, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta and Portugal) have relocated more than 10 per cent of their allocation.²⁴

The European Parliament has repeatedly called on Member States to fulfil their obligations with regard to relocation measures and it has insisted on the need for a binding and mandatory legislative approach to resettlement. Some countries, however, have objected to a proposed EU quota system for resettling migrants across the EU. Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, known for his anti-immigration stance, has announced a referendum on 2 October on whether to accept a future mandatory EU quota system for resettling migrants. Along with Slovakia, Hungary has filed a case against the EU decision on mandatory refugee relocation quotas at the European Court of Justice. The Czech Republic, which

13 "Greek Appeals Committee Halts Deportation of Syrian, Ruling Turkey 'Unsafe'", in *ekathimerini.com*, 20 May 2016, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/208850>.

14 The principle of *non-refoulement*, first enshrined in article 33(1) of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees, forbids the expulsion of refugees to their country of origin or any other country in which they might be subject to persecution.

15 Ceylan Yeginsu and Karam Shoumali, "11 Syrian Refugees Reported Killed by Turkish Border Guards", in *The New York Times*, 19 June 2016, <http://nyti.ms/1Y39DOH>.

16 William Spindler, *UNHCR Expresses Concern over EU-Turkey Plan*, 11 March 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/3/56dee1546>.

17 Relocation refers to the movement of refugees from one EU Member State to another. Resettlement means the movement of refugees from a country outside of the EU to an EU Member State.

18 European Council, *Justice and Home Affairs Council Main Results*, 22 September 2015, <http://europa.eu/!mg77vV>.

19 European Council, *Justice and Home Affairs Council Main Results*, 20 July 2015, <http://europa.eu/!kX37JY>.

20 European Commission, *Second Report on the Progress Made in the Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement*, cit., p. 4.

21 European Commission, *Fifth Report on Relocation and Resettlement* (COM/2016/480), 13 July 2016, p. 10 and Annex 3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0480>.

22 European Commission, *Towards a Reform of the Common European Asylum System and Enhancing Legal Avenues to Europe* (COM/2016/197), 6 April 2016, p. 15, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0197>.

23 The temporary emergency relocation scheme was established in two Council Decisions in September 2015 in which Member States committed to relocate 160,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece by September 2017.

24 European Commission, *Fifth Report on Relocation and Resettlement*, cit, Annexes 1-2. Cfr. European Commission, *Fourth Report on Relocation and Resettlement* (COM/2016/416), 15 June 2016, p. 3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0416>.

also voted against the resettlement scheme back in 2015, has recently announced that it will not accept any refugees and that it will take legal action if sanctions are imposed.²⁵

Meanwhile Greece is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. In total more than 57,000 migrants are present in Greece, around 8,450 on the islands and around 49,000 on mainland Greece.²⁶ In recent weeks, the number of migrants arriving in the Greek islands has nearly doubled. Following the failed coup attempt in Turkey, the Greek government announced that some 9,420 men, women and children had been registered on Lesbos and other islands.²⁷ According to Save the Children, average daily arrivals on the Greek islands have risen from 56 in May to 90 in August.²⁸ The administrative disorder in Turkey following the 15 July coup attempt could partly explain the rise in migrant numbers. Although their numbers have sharply decreased compared to this time last year, the increasing flow of refugees has sparked fears that the reduction in numbers previously observed may not be sustainable, putting the deal in jeopardy.

1.2 Visa-free Access to Europe

Another factor which risks the continuity of the deal is the promise of visa-free travel for Turkish nationals. Turkish officials have repeatedly warned that Ankara will back out of the agreement with the EU if Brussels does not deliver the promised visa-free travel for Turks in return.

Visa liberalisation talks have reached a stalemate after the publication of the third progress report on the implementation of Turkey's Visa Liberalisation Roadmap on 4 May.²⁹ Out of the 72 requirements listed in the Roadmap,³⁰ Turkey has fulfilled all of them except five. Among the remaining five there is one of critical importance: the revision of Turkey's anti-terror law. The Commission has called on Turkey to revise its legislation and practices on terrorism in line with European standards, notably by better aligning the definition of terrorism in

²⁵ Robert Muller, "Czech Deputy PM Rejects Refugee Quotas, Says Country Should Fight Any EU Sanctions", in *Reuters*, 3 August 2016, <http://reut.rs/2auTj8C>.

²⁶ According to Greek authorities and UNHCR.

²⁷ Helena Smith, "Aegean Islands Alarm as Refugee Numbers Rise after Turkey Coup Attempt", in *The Guardian*, 30 July 2016, <https://gu.com/p/4pba2/stw>.

²⁸ "Migrant Crisis: Greek Islands See Rising Numbers in Camps", in *BBC News*, 17 August 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37099332>.

²⁹ See European Commission, *Third Report on Progress by Turkey in Fulfilling the Requirements of Its Visa Liberalisation Roadmap* (COM/2016/278), 4 May 2016, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0278>.

³⁰ See European Commission, *Roadmap towards a Visa-Free Regime with Turkey*, 16 December 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/docs/20131216-roadmap_towards_the_visa-free_regime_with_turkey_en.pdf.

order to narrow its scope.

Human rights groups say Turkey's anti-terror laws have often been used to indict journalists and other government critics, limiting freedom of speech. Turkey would be willing to modify its anti-terror law if the changes would not impede the fight against terrorism, as the country has been subject to an increasing number of terrorist attacks since the past year by both domestic and international terrorist groups.

The decision to grant Turkey visa-free access to the Schengen area will be put to the vote of the European Parliament and the Council.³¹ However, the European Parliament Conference of Presidents has already made clear that the proposed visa waiver will be dealt with only after all the benchmarks have been fulfilled. Until the Commission provides the Parliament with a written guarantee that all requirements have been fully met, no referral to the relevant committee will take place.³² In light of the rise of asylum requests from Turkey³³ driven by domestic political developments, the EU wants to ensure that persecuted Turks don't intend to take advantage of the visa exemption to seek political asylum in EU countries.

Visa liberalisation is the most positive incentive to reward Turkey for its cooperation with the EU on curbing migration. Completion is now expected to occur in October. However, in the post-coup environment, the Turkish government is not likely to ease anti-terrorism rules. Knowing this, the Commission might end up postponing the fourth progress report on Turkey's implementation of the visa liberalisation roadmap, expected to be published this September, in order to avoid a major diplomatic crisis.

1.3 The Facility for Refugees in Turkey

In an effort to support refugees under temporary protection, as well as host communities in Turkey, a Facility for Refugees was agreed in the joint statement of 29 November 2015. The European Commission and its Member States committed to provide an initial 3 billion euros, made up of 1 billion euros from the EU budget and 2 billion euros from the EU Member States, for 2016 and 2017. Following the agreement reached in March, the EU

³¹ In the Council, the decision on the Commission's proposal will be taken by qualified majority voting. In the European Parliament, it will be subject to simple majority voting.

³² European Parliament, *Visa Liberalisation: Turkey Must Meet All Benchmarks before EP Can Vote*, 4 May 2016, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160504IPR25841>.

³³ According to recent statistics from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), in 2015 1,719 Turkish citizens applied for asylum, and in the first six months of 2016 there have already been 1,767. See Emma Anderson, "More Turks are seeking asylum in Germany", in *The Local*, 5 August 2016, <http://www.thelocal.de/20160805/more-turks-seeking-asylum-in-germany-report>.

has committed to mobilise an additional 3 billion euros up to the end of 2018 in case the initial resources are fully depleted.

The disbursement of the funds has been rather slow. The first contracts for the Facility were signed on 4 March 2016 and the first payments took place shortly thereafter. By the end of May, of the overall 3 billion euros, 740 million euros had been allocated in total. Of the 740 million euros allocated, only 105 million euros had been disbursed. With a Special Measure worth 1.415 billion euros adopted to support refugees at the end of July,³⁴ the European Commission has now mobilised 2.155 billion euros out of the foreseen 3 billion euros for this year and next year. Of the 2.155 billion euros allocated, 229 million euros has been contracted as of today, but the amount disbursed to date continues to be 105 million euros.

The fact that the 1 billion euros coming from the EU budget is not fresh money but a reorganisation or re-labelling of existing EU funds, makes it particular difficult to coordinate the amounts to be spent.³⁵ On the other hand, the contributions of several Member States to the Refugee Facility have not yet been committed, which explains why the funds have not been transferred. By mid-May, 22 Member States had indicated their contributions to the Facility with a total of 1.61 billion euros pledged out of the 2 billion euros committed for this year and next. Six Member States are however still in the process of finalising their contributions: Austria, Belgium, Greece, Poland, Romania and Spain.

The main beneficiaries of the EU funds have been major international humanitarian organisations, like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and UN-related agencies, which are working in close cooperation with Turkish partner organisations. However, smaller and non-UN-family NGOs' likelihood to implement projects funded under the Refugee Facility for Turkey is rather limited, as the first set of projects announced suggest. The lack of open competition in assigning the projects hampers the inclusion of implementing organisations not necessarily closely linked with the EU institutions.

One of the most tangible and visible EU-funded humanitarian projects in Turkey is the introduction of an e-card, provided by the United Nations World Food Program and the Turkish Red Crescent, which can be redeemed for food at designated shops for 585,000

Syrian refugees living outside of camps and 150,000 Syrian refugees living in refugee camps. The Commission is currently working on the design of an electronic card which will allow the most vulnerable refugees to receive monthly transfers to meet their needs in terms of food, shelter and sanitation, known as an Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN).

On June 20, coinciding with World Refugee Day, Turkey's first-ever refugee council was formed with the aim of bringing together various civil society organisations (CSOs) working to alleviate the suffering of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey.³⁶ At the moment, the council is composed of 14 founding member organisations from all corners of the country, but its number is likely to increase in the months to come. Small local CSOs are usually the ones working closest with refugees and they often lack resources and implementation capacity to carry out their mission. Easing their access to EU funds would strengthen the role of civil society in providing long-term and sustainable support to refugees in Turkey.

2. Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Status Struggle

Turkey is currently hosting 2.7 million Syrian refugees and has spent over 7 billion euros since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. The biggest share of the expenditure has been allocated to the 26 government-run refugee camps, where more than 250,000 refugees live, representing just 10 per cent of all Syrian refugees in the country. The vast majority of them live outside camps with limited access to basic services, having to survive under very challenging circumstances.

Despite legislative changes made over the years to Europeanise Turkey's migration and asylum laws,³⁷ experts argue that Turkey cannot fundamentally be considered a safe third country, one of the key implicit assumptions of the EU-Turkey Statement, as it maintains a geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention. This limitation entails that only refugees originating from Europe are entitled to refugee status. Therefore Syrians living in Turkey are considered to be "guests" with temporary protection status provided by the Turkish government. Those who register can enjoy free access to education and basic healthcare, but they are not always able to register or willing to do so.

³⁴ European Commission, *Facility for Refugees in Turkey: Over €1.4 billion in Support of Education and Health for Syrian Refugees*, 28 July 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2661_en.htm.

³⁵ Leonhard den Hertog, "EU Budgetary Responses to the 'Refugee Crisis': Reconfiguring the Funding Landscape", in *CEPS Papers in Liberty and Security in Europe*, No. 93 (May 2016), p. 7-8, <https://www.ceps.eu/node/11582>.

³⁶ Emine Kart, "Turkey's First Ever 'Refugee Council' Holds First Congress", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 21 June 2016, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nID=100739>.

³⁷ For a detailed analysis of Turkey's asylum laws see Ahmet İçduygu and Evin Millet, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of Pseudo-Integration", in *Global Turkey in Europe Working Papers*, No. 13 (5 August 2016), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6690>.

Lack of information on the registration procedures is the most frequently cited reason for failing to register. Upon their arrival to Turkey, Syrians are expected to register at their local police station and receive a temporary protection card allowing them to stay, albeit not permanently. In principle, Syrian refugees can choose to register in all the Turkish provinces. However, the right to access public services is limited to the first place of registration (generally towns on the Syrian border), thus if they decide to move to a bigger city later on, where emancipatory opportunities seem greater, they end up losing their rights. Furthermore, the Turkish authorities have imposed restrictions on the movement of Syrian refugees across the country in order to halt the growing irregular sea crossings to the Greek islands.

The lack of permanent residence permits impacts all aspects of everyone's everyday life: having access to legal housing, being able to enter the education system, finding a job or opening your own business. In January this year, the Turkish government started to issue work permits for Syrian refugees who have been in Turkey for more than six months. The impact has been rather limited as employers have to apply on behalf of employees once residency, registration and health requirements are met. An employment quota also applies: Syrians cannot exceed 10 per cent of the employed Turkish citizens in the same workplace. As of July, only 5,500 have been granted a work permit in 2016, which amounts to 0.2 per cent of the Syrian refugee population.³⁸ Although employers must pay the legal minimum wage (1,300 Turkish lira, around 400 euros) and social security payments, their salary is generally lower and the hours of work usually exceed the daily limit.

When it comes to education, refugee children often face considerable access problems. Approximately 1 million of the refugees living in Turkey are school-aged (between ages 5 and 18)³⁹ but only a small number attend school. According to the Turkish education ministry, some 665,000 Syrian children were not in school in May, primarily among those who live outside camps.⁴⁰ Having to work to supplement the family income is the most common explanation for the low level of school attendance. Many refugee children work illegally making clothes or shoes, even though Turkey bans children under 15 from working and those up to 17 can only work 40 hours weekly.⁴¹

38 "Syrian refugees: Struggles in Turkey Intensify", in *Al Jazeera*, 25 July 2016, <http://aje.io/tn9w>.

39 See Table 3 in the Annexes.

40 "In Turkish Sweatshops, Syrian Children Sew to Survive", in *Reuters*, 26 July 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/europe-migrants-turkey-children>.

41 *Ibid.*

2.1 The Contribution of Volunteering Projects to the Well-Being of Syrians

In light of this reality, a Syrian refugee who arrived in Turkey five years ago decided to open a school for refugee children in Istanbul. During a field trip planned in the framework of a seminar organised by Stiftung Mercator, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Istanbul Policy Centre (IPC) on the humanitarian dimension of the refugee crisis in Turkey in July this year, we visited a Syrian school located in Istanbul's Fatih district, home to a large Syrian population, and met with the school's director.⁴²

The director opened the school a year ago relying only on his own funds. He fully renovated a six-story old building and converted it into a school, equipped with a medical centre employing Syrian doctors. In just one year, the number of students has doubled. Today the school has 425 students from the ages of 3 to 15, and 26 teachers. Most of the students' families cannot afford the tuition fees and until very recently the teachers were working on a voluntary basis. Since the school registered with the Ministry of Education's system, the Turkish government pays some of the teachers' salaries. As a result of cooperation between UNICEF and the Ministry of National Education, over 4,000 Syrian teachers have received monthly payments since January 2015.⁴³

Syrian children can choose between attending Turkish public schools or temporary education centres (TEC), which provide primary and secondary education in Arabic and follow a curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government. Seventy-eight per cent of Syrian refugee students attend TECs and the rest attend Turkish public institutions.⁴⁴ The transition to Turkish schools remain significantly low and some Syrian students have returned to TECs after failing to integrate, primarily due to lack of proper Turkish language skills. In this regard, it is crucial to deliver appropriate linguistic support to migrant children to facilitate their access to the Turkish education system, which will ultimately guarantee them greater prospects for employment later on.

Other similar initiatives have emerged across the country to provide guidance to newly arrived Syrian refugee families as well as child support. A community centre that opened two months ago, also in the Fatih district of Istanbul, welcomes around 50 kids per day who receive Turkish language courses, craft classes and psychosocial

42 His name is not mentioned for privacy reasons.

43 UNICEF, *Syrian Teachers Welcome UNICEF Incentive Initiative*, 26 April 2015, http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_27682.html.

44 Bülent Aras and Salih Yasun, "The Educational Opportunities and Challenges of Syrian Refugee Students in Turkey: Temporary Education Centers and Beyond", in *IPC-Mercator Policy Briefs*, July 2016, p. 3, <http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Bulent-Aras-and-Salih-Yasun-11.pdf>.

support. The centre also provides assistance to families on how to apply for a residence card or access medical care.

The fact that many children have been out of education for several years seriously undermines their future prospects and aggravates the trauma resulting from their displacement. Project Lift “Hold my Hand”⁴⁵ works to ensure that the psychological needs of refugee children are addressed. In collaboration with Sultanbeyli Municipality,⁴⁶ Project Lift organises five-day workshops where children learn self-control and improve their communication skills through music, dance and art. The NGO also organises socio-cultural excursions to bring the children closer to the Turkish community. This is a rare example of collaboration between Turkish municipalities and civil society initiatives, as municipalities are generally not aware of their existence. Projects and initiatives that account for the refugees’ needs deserve greater recognition, support and encouragement from local municipalities to effectively fulfil their mission.

2.2 Integration vs. Naturalisation

In early July, Turkey president Erdoğan announced plans to grant citizenship to skilled Syrians. Up to 300,000 Syrian refugees living in Turkey could be given citizenship.⁴⁷ As Syrians who become Turkish nationals would be able to vote one year after being granted nationality, opposition parties have opposed such a move believing that it may be intended to enlarge the AK Party’s voter base. The proposal has also not been warmly welcomed by the Turkish public. The hashtag #ÜlkemdeSuriyeliİstemiyorum (“I don’t want Syrians in my country”) became the top trending topic in Turkey on Twitter on 3 July, exposing anti-refugee sentiment.⁴⁸

While the Turkish people have been admirably hospitable to the large number of refugees living in the country, many think that their immediate naturalisation would be a hasty decision, especially taking into account that Syrians haven’t yet been granted full refugee status. Moreover, the time they have spent so far in Turkey under temporary protection is not being counted towards obtaining a long-term residence permit or the

⁴⁵ Project Lift is a project of Maya Foundation, launched in 2014, to provide psychological support, community awareness and integration of Syrian and Turkish children. For more information see the project website: <http://www.projectlift.org.tr>.

⁴⁶ Sultanbeyli is a working-class suburb at the edge of Istanbul’s Asian side governed by the AK Party. The municipality kindly allows Project Lift to use a public school to hold its workshops.

⁴⁷ “Up to 300,000 Syrians Could Get Turkish Citizenship: Report”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 July 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nID=101412>.

⁴⁸ “Turkish Twitter Users Criticize Syrian Citizenship Proposal as Hashtag Becomes TT”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 3 July 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nID=101188>.

acquisition of Turkish citizenship.

Integration should precede naturalisation, and integration requires a protected status for Syrians in accordance with the UN Convention on refugees. Syrians feel they have no future in Turkey as they are most often not able to obtain a temporary residence permit, exercise their rights to free movement or find a job that would allow them not only to live in safety but also to integrate in the Turkish society. Many express the wish to return to Syria. But before the situation in their home country improves, they are likely to stay many more years in Turkey. That is why it becomes so critical to intensify the assistance to Syrian refugees in Turkey, not only based on satisfying their material needs but also to help them settle and integrate into society.

2.3 The Importance of Keeping the Deal Alive

The migration crisis is far from over. As the war in Syria shows no sign of abating, more Syrians will desperately try to leave the country. In light of this reality, the EU and Turkey should come together to overcome its political, social and economic repercussions. While the deal struck between the EU and Turkey is a step in the right direction, it is not enough. EU Member States should take in more refugees instead of concentrating their efforts towards limiting arrivals in Europe.

Despite the reported good results in the first months of the deal’s implementation, it would be fanciful to think that the crisis is solved. While Turkey has so far lived up to its side of the deal, the Member States’ willingness to take in more refugees for resettlement has been very unsatisfactory. Turkey cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of accommodating such high number of refugees alone. The EU Member States must show solidarity with Turkey to resolve this unprecedented humanitarian crisis and agree to a fairer distribution of refugees in Europe by fulfilling the obligations assumed in the Council Decisions.

The EU should also ensure that the human rights of migrants and refugees, as guaranteed by the 1951 Refugee Convention, are fully respected and it must duly investigate the allegations of ill-treatment of refugees at the hands of the Turkish security forces. Refugees and asylum-seekers should be able to regularise their stay in Turkey without delay and to receive all the information they need to be able to exercise their rights under national law. In this regard, the EU should continue to encourage the Turkish authorities to lift Turkey’s geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention in order to recognise Syrians as refugees and allow them to enjoy the full protection afforded by the Convention.

While the living conditions inside the camps deserve special acknowledgment, the future of refugees living in

urban areas looks dire. More should be done to improve the prospects for long-term integration in Turkey. The EU will have to make greater efforts to assist the Turkish authorities in providing further welfare support to refugees living outside camps through the Facility for Refugees. The education participation rates of Syrian refugee children in Turkey remains extremely low and it needs to be addressed urgently in order to ensure that a generation of Syrian children is not lost. Facilitating access to the labour market by removing existing barriers and reviewing limitation rules is equally important. Last but not least, supporting smaller local NGOs by granting them access to EU funds should also be envisaged, as they are doing a commendable job in helping refugees start new lives with hope.

In recent weeks there has been growing resentment between the EU and Turkey over the promises made under the deal. After years of stalled negotiations, the sudden re-energisation of accession talks risks further undermining an already fragile bond if it will not be able to finally deliver. For that reason, neither side should engage in horse-trading over refugees as there is simply too much at stake for the deal to fail.

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• Table 1 | Resettlement (state of play as of 11 July 2016)

Member State / Associated State	Total resettled under the 20 July scheme, including under the 1:1 mechanism with Turkey	Total resettled under the 1:1 mechanism with Turkey (since 4 April 2016)
Austria	1,453	x
Belgium	333	4
Czech Republic	52	x
Denmark	481	x
Finland	192	11 (outside of 20 July scheme)
France	335	x
Germany	294	294
<i>Iceland</i>	48	x
Ireland	273	x
Italy	419	70
Latvia	6	6
<i>Liechtenstein</i>	20	x
Lithuania	5	5
Luxembourg	x	27 (outside of 20 July scheme)
Netherlands	366	56
<i>Norway</i>	1,098	x
Portugal	12	12
Spain	118	57
Sweden	380	264
<i>Switzerland</i>	519	x
United Kingdom	1,864	x
Total	8,268	802

Source: European Commission, *Fifth Report on Relocation and Resettlement*, cit., Annex 3.

• Table 2 | Relocation (state of play as of 11 July 2016)

Member State / Associated State	Relocated from Italy	Commitment legally foreseen in the Council decisions	Relocated from Greece	Commitment legally foreseen in the Council decisions
Austria	x	462	x	1,491
Belgium	29	1,397	90	2,415
Bulgaria	x	471	6	831
Croatia	4	374	x	594
Cyprus	10	139	35	181
Czech Republic	x	1,036	4	1,655
Denmark	x		x	
Estonia	x	125	27	204
Finland	180	779	217	1,299
France	181	7,115	810	12,599
Germany	20	10,327	37	17,209
Hungary	x	306	x	988
Ireland	x	360	38	240
Latvia	2	186	39	295
Lithuania	x	251	34	420
Luxembourg	x	248	71	309
Malta	17	53	24	78
Netherlands	125	2,150	242	3,797
Poland	x	1,861	x	4,321
Portugal	150	1,173	302	1,778
Romania	6	1,608	62	2,572
Slovakia	x	250	x	652
Slovenia	6	218	28	349
Spain	40	2,676	147	6,647
Sweden	39	1,388	x	2,378
Switzerland	34		x	
Total	843	34,953	2,213	63,302

Source: European Commission, *Fifth Report on Relocation and Resettlement*, cit., Annexes 1-2.

• **Table 3 | Distribution of Age and Gender of Registered Syrians under Temporary Protection (as of 28 July 2016)**

Age	Man	Woman	Total
0-4	188,277	175,789	364,066
5-9	197,196	186,352	383,548
10-14	150,366	137,580	287,946
15-18	131,534	110,799	242,333
19-24	218,848	173,800	392,648
25-29	147,184	114,832	262,016
30-34	120,266	96,211	216,477
35-39	86,185	73,646	159,831
40-44	59,456	56,120	115,576
45-49	47,984	44,194	92,178
50-54	37,403	36,142	73,545
55-59	25,266	25,369	50,635
60-64	17,511	18,049	35,560
65-69	11,354	11,725	23,079
70-74	6,179	7,110	13,289
75-79	3,790	4,519	8,309
80-84	2,017	2,556	4,573
85-89	1,088	1,252	2,340
90+	438	599	1,037
Total	1,452,342	1,276,644	2,728,986

Source: Turkish Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM).