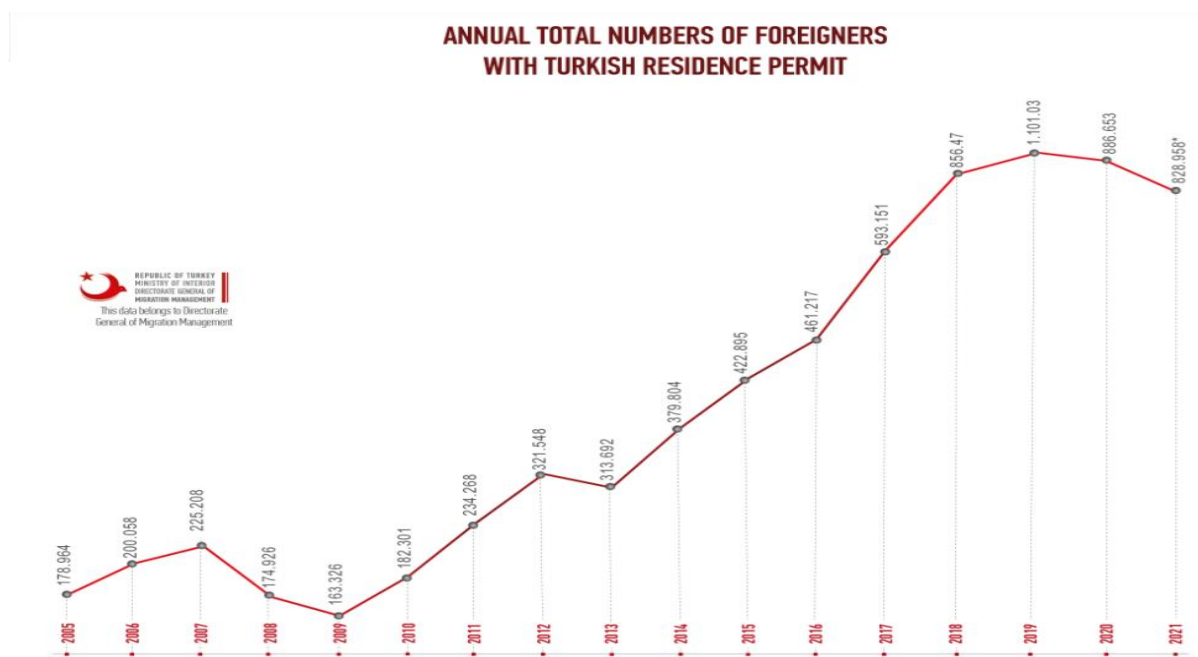


## LEGAL MIGRATION

by ICMPD Turkey

### 1. Trends in 2020

Priority considerations on migration in Turkey is dominated by issues of irregular migration and protection, and this situation will not change in 2021. At the same time, Turkey's geographical location does not only attract irregular migration, but Turkey also attracts an increased number of people for potential legal migration. The number of foreigners obtaining a residence, study or work permit in Turkey through existing legal pathways have been steadily increasing in the past decade. According to the Directorate for Migration Management (DGMM), in 2020 (there were a total of 886,653 people residing in Turkey legally under different types of residence permits. 67% are under Short-term Residence Permit, 9% under Student Residence-Permit, 9% under Family Residence Permit, and 15% under different other types of residence permits.<sup>1</sup>



\*by the date of 13.01.2021

Source: DGMM, Turkey

A break-down by nationality reveal that in 2020, Iraqi citizens constituted the largest group of foreigners with residence permits in Turkey, followed by Syrian, Turkmen, Azeris and Iranians.

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.goc.gov.tr/residence-permits>.

**FOREIGNERS WHOSE WHO HAVE BEEN IN TURKEY  
WITH RESIDENCE PERMIT IN 2020 (TOP TEN COUNTRIES)**



Source: DGMM, Turkey

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), in 2019 Iraqi citizens took the first place among foreign immigrants arriving in Turkey with 14.5%. Iraqi nationals were followed by nationals of Turkmenistan with 13.8%, Afghanistan with 8.2%, Syria with 7.5% and Iran with 7.3%. Iraqi citizens also took the lead in the list of foreign emigrant population from Turkey with 23.9%, followed by nationals of Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. 13.3% of the immigrant population belonged to the 25-29 age group, whereas 12.2% were aged between 20 and 24 and 11.6% between 30 and 34. In 2019, Istanbul received the largest immigrant population with 45.3% of new arrival to Turkey, followed by Ankara with 9.2% and Antalya with 6.5%.<sup>2</sup> Hence, Istanbul remains Turkey's main hotspot for legal migration, with 380,063 registered foreigners with residence permits in the city at the end of 2020.<sup>3</sup> It is also interesting to note that the number of emigrants from Turkey also increased by 2% in 2019 compared to the previous year, reaching 330,289 people, of which 84,863 persons had Turkish citizenship and 245,426 persons were of foreign citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Major Policy Developments

In recent years, Turkey has introduced different measures to promote regular migration, such as the Turquoise Card in 2016, which is a point-based identification system to promote the employment of qualified foreign workers in Turkey. The new system aims to attract migrants who have strong educational and professional experience, investors, scientists and researchers.<sup>5</sup> Besides, in the second Part of its Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), Turkey has regulated all details with regard to visa issuances, procedures and exemptions and facilitated such processes. This can also be said concerning residence

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), statistics as of 13.01.2021: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/residence-permits>

<sup>4</sup> Turkish Statistical institute Website: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=International-Migration-Statistics-2019-33709>

<sup>5</sup> IOM Website: <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-welcomes-turkeys-turquoise-card-system>.

permits, as the LFIP now provides open and clear provisions on the different types of permits and their particular conditions.

Nevertheless, Turkey still lacks a clearly defined policy as to legal migration. It is of utmost importance to take a data-driven approach to define sectors where foreign labour is needed and labour shortages may occur in the following years. Accordingly, a labour migration policy must be implemented for the upcoming years.

Migrants in Turkey and potential migrants who consider moving to Turkey still face certain problems that may discourage them. Policy changes must occur in the issuance of visas and residence permits, as the procedures can be streamlined, lack digitalization and regularly last too long.

The recognition and equivalence of qualifications, as well as the often sub-standard working conditions of migrants are two further obstacles to legal migration in Turkey. The recognition and equivalence of qualifications by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) require of a lengthy and cumbersome procedure that has many gaps and needs to be reformed. There are, for example, major difficulties as to the recognition of vocational school diplomas obtained abroad.

Besides, depending on the sector, immigrants often face worse working conditions than their Turkish counterparts. Lower wages and benefits, as well as longer working hours could deter people from migrating to Turkey. Hence, existing standards and laws need to be enforced thoroughly.

### 3. Conclusions and Outlook for 2021

Official data confirm a steady increase in the number of foreigners applying for residence, study or work permits in Turkey over the past decade. It is safe to assume that the relative decline in 2020, as in the case of irregular migrants, is due to the impact of Covid-19. The limitations on mobility and the lockdowns restricted the ability of migrants globally to either return to their home country or move to foreign countries to establish a new life, engage in a new job, study abroad or unite with families.

It is highly likely that the global pandemic already had and will have a disproportionate effect on immigrants and their families in Turkey in 2021 considering, inter alia, health, employment, education and integration.

The upcoming year will be marked by continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Turkey's economy, especially on certain sectors, such as tourism and gastronomy, in which many immigrants are employed. The loss of jobs and opportunities, as well as exacerbation of economic hardship may lead to an increased number of legal migrants to considering leaving Turkey; however, the lack of opportunities and instability in main countries of origin is likely

to deter legal migrants from returning to their countries but to explore instead pathways to migrate to the European Union or other countries recovering faster from the present crisis. Hence, regular migrants affected by Covid-19 implications in Turkey could also be willing to start seeking for opportunities in high-income countries where demographic pressures oblige governments to create more legal pathways for labour migration in diverse sectors.

#### 4. Policy Recommendations

- It is expected that after the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, there would be both increased immigration to and emigration from Turkey, as a mid-income country. At the same time, there might also be an increased demand for migrant workers in Turkey in some key industries, such as health care. Thus, in order to prevent irregular migration and promote legal migration that would respond to the emerging needs of the Turkish economy, as well as to prevent brain drain and the emigration of highly skilled Turkish citizens, Turkey needs to prioritize the development of a comprehensive labour migration policy.
- The draft national strategy on legal migration should be finalized and adopted in a timely manner. The creation of further legal pathways for migration is of crucial importance. It is of utmost importance to employ a data-driven approach to define sectors where foreign labour is needed and labour shortages may occur in the following years. Accordingly, a migration policy must be implemented for the upcoming years.
- At the same time, the efficiency and transparency of procedures in place need to be improved significantly, including through further digitalization, while tackling discriminatory practices against migrant workers.

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