ICMPD
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

ICMPD
Regional Migration Outlook 2021
TURKEY & WESTERN BALKANS

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1. Introduction

In 2020, **Turkey** marked its' sixth year as a host to the largest number of refugees in the world. There are over 3.6 million Syrians registered under temporary protection[i] and up to 350,000 refugees of other disparate nationalities, with Afghans, Pakistanis and Iraqis forming the majority[ii]. Discernibly this puts a major strain on the country. Turkey was traditionally a country of origin and transit, but recent regional events have contributed to its' evolving development as a major destination country. In 2020, the migration debate in Turkey was dominated by the impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** and issues surrounding **Syrians under temporary protection,** and **irregular migration and asylum.** The Covid 19 pandemic has profoundly affected migration in the region. While 2020 saw an incremental rise in the number of Syrians under temporary protection, for the first time in years, Turkey registered a decline in irregular migrants on land and sea. This was reflected by a decrease in secondary movements to Greece and further into Europe. As a result of the limitations imposed by the pandemic, Turkey had to *de facto* freeze all registrations, refugee status determinations and resettlement operations between the months of March and August, despite the pandemics' exacerbating impact on the vulnerability of refugees and migrants in Turkey.

The numbers of refugee and migrant arrivals reduced during the first half of the year, but overall, 2020 witnessed a continuously high number of arriving migrants and refugees in the **Western Balkans**. This was so, notwithstanding stricter controls at the EU external borders and travel restrictions due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. Border closures and travel restrictions led to an increased number of migrants stranded in the Western Balkans as well as an increase in smuggling activities. This occurred mainly within countries bordering the EU – namely Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Migration management structures in these countries were significantly pressured in terms of border management, reception, accommodation, and the protection of migrants. Asylum applications were mainly submitted to ensure a temporary residence status while attempting secondary movements to other European countries. At the same time, the return of migrants and rejected asylum seekers from the Western Balkans to countries of transit and origin remained limited during 2020. There is an important level of intra-regional movement of migrants in the Western Balkans, but double registrations due to the lack of reliable data (and data systems) remain an issue.

This Regional Migration Outlook for Turkey and Western Balkans by the ICMPD presents a **brief analysis of migration and policy trends in the region in 2020** and provides an outlook on developments to watch out for in 2021.

2. Migration 'hotspots'

In 2020, Syria and Afghanistan continued to be the largest source of migration towards **Turkey** and the region. March 2021 will mark the tenth anniversary of the conflict in Syria. Also in 2020, Syria remained the country which produced the largest number of internally displaced persons and refugees worldwide, with over 6.6 million persons internally displaced and over 6.7 million registered refugees in neighbouring countries who fled for their safety[iii]. As of end of December 2020, there were 3,641,370 registered Syrians residing in Turkey, with Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and other Northern African countries following on the list. Almost a decade after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, there has been no marked improvement in the security situation of the country. While temporary peace agreements have been established in restricted zones, displacement remained a major feature of the country throughout 2020. An estimated 700,000 civilians fled their homes to relatively safer areas near the Turkish border between January and March, following attempts by the Syrian regime to consolidate its control around Idlib[iv]. Some residents were able to return to their homes after a ceasefire was brokered by Russia and Turkey. Meanwhile, Turkey continued its' military operations to create a safe zone in northern Syria. In October, the Turkish Minister of Interior announced that Turkey's cross-border operations enabled the return of more than 414,000 Syrians[v]. While efforts for a political solution to the country's civil war continued in 2020, the process so far, has not delivered any concrete results and is not expected to lead to a breakthrough in 2021. Syria was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic as well. Despite the absence of reliable figures on the exact impact of the pandemic, with an already crumbling healthcare system and economy due to years of conflict, the pandemic may increase migration from Syria to Turkey (and neighbouring countries) in 2021, for those in search of access to better public health opportunities.

The instability and violence which made Afghanistan a major source of refugees for over 30 years have perpetuated in 2020. It is the second largest origin country in the world, with 2.7 million refugees[vi]. Afghans constitute the largest group of asylum seekers in Turkey since 2019 and are among the top applicants for asylum in the European Union (EU). Although it is promising that face-to-face talks commenced in September 2020 between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban in Qatar, the fate of the Afghan peace process remains uncertain. There was a surge in violence, further deterioration of the economy and increasing unemployment in the country in 2020, which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This increases the likelihood that secondary movements of Afghans, through Iran and Pakistan, to Turkey and the EU will continue also in the post-pandemic era.

Meanwhile, although at a slightly lower level, the entire **Western Balkans** region continued to face significant numbers of migrant arrivals, despite the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the end of 2020, around 14,000 to 15,000 migrants were reported[vii] as being present in the region. The majority of them being in Bosnia and Herzegovina (estimated 7,500) and mainly accommodated in reception centres and private accommodation (but also sleeping rough). In Serbia 6,500 migrants were present in the country, with most staying in reception centres and some in unofficial sites.

There was substantial pressure on the authorities to ensure adequate facilities, in particular in areas nearby the EU external borders in the west of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the north and north-west of Serbia. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an estimated 6,500 migrants are sheltered in EU-funded temporary reception centres in the Una-Sana and Sarajevo cantons[viii]. Most of the migrants are hosted in the Una Sana Canton, bordering Croatia. All reception camps are accommodating migrants beyond their capacities, leaving a number of migrants having to sleep rough. The seriousness of the situation was confirmed in December 2020, when the (temporary) accommodation centre Lipa close to the Croatian border was closed and subsequently put on fire by occupants. Approximately 1,000 migrants have since been accommodated in tent facilities set up by the authorities following the fire at the site, while many still remain in the open. Although the 19 governmental reception facilities (asylum and reception centres) in Serbia can provide long-term accommodation for up to 6,000 people and temporary shelter for around 1,000 people[ix], authorities in Serbia are also facing limits in their reception capacities, and especially those facilities close to the borders with Hungary have reached their capacities.

## 3. Migration trends in the region

In **Turkey**, the migration debate during 2020 was mainly dominated by the impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** and issues surrounding **Syrians under temporary protection, irregular migration and asylum.** The pandemic has had a substantial impact on Turkey in various ways. For example, restrictions on travel were introduced including the suspension of international passenger flights from March to June 2020. Administrative procedures related to legal migration and international protection came to a halt and, as in all States worldwide, the economy was badly hit. As a consequence, migrants and refugees were put in a particularly vulnerable position. The loss/reduction of employment and income in the majority of migrant and refugee households (estimated at 80% by the UN-led needs assessment 3RP)[x], resulted in an increase in basic needs, along with an increase in protection concerns (including high risk of Sexual and Gender Based Violence –SGBV)[xi]. Humanitarian and development partners active in Turkey have adapted service

delivery modalities to continue their efforts to support the affected population. The EU redirected €105 million to support the Covid-19 response in Turkey, notably to support the most vulnerable refugees[xii].Governorates and local administrations, often in collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs), provided basic assistance to refugees and migrant communities. However, limitations of face-to-face service provision resulted in major difficulties in the identification of protection needs by CSOs.

The provision of asylum and protection services to Syrian refugees continued to put a significant strain on Turkey, with 3,641,370 (as of 31 December 2020) **Syrians registered under temporary protection**. This figure represents a 1.81% increase compared to 2019, although, the actual figures are estimated to be higher, due to a backlog in registration. Turkey had to de facto freeze all registration, refugee status determination and resettlement operations from March until August 2020, due to limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. By the end of 2020, only 58,782 of Syrian refugees in Turkey lived in camps, whereas the vast majority lived in urban areas integrated with the local populations. While Istanbul, Gaziantep and Hatay host the largest Syrian refugee populations; Kilis (73.91%) Hatay (26.6%), Gaziantep (21.72%) top the list of provinces hosting the largest refugee populations in relation to the percentage of the total population of the respective province.

As for **irregular migration**, there was a discernible decrease in the **detection of illegal border-crossings** in Turkey in 2020, mainly attributed to the impact of the pandemic. The number of irregular migrants apprehended by Turkish authorities stood at **122,302 as of end of December 2020**. This indicates a **decrease of 73% in comparison to 2019**[xiii].
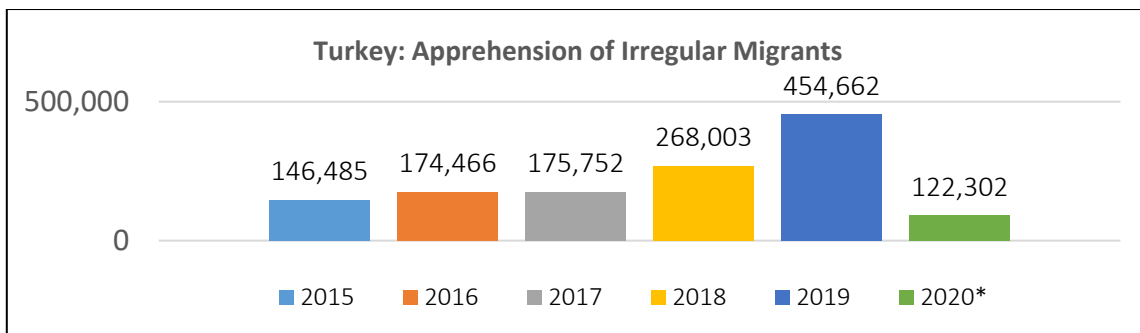
*Source: Department of Migration Management (DGMM), Turkey (*as of 31 December 2020)*

According to the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG), in 2020 a total of 20,380 irregular migrants were apprehended at sea, compared to 61,028 in 2019[xiv]. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), on the other hand, reported 104,359 illegal attempts of entry and 5,970 illegal attempts to exit from Turkey

throughout 2020, compared to a total of 216,760 illegal crossings detected at land borders in 2019[xv].

In tandem with these dynamics, in 2020 there was also a **sharp decline in irregular crossings from Turkey to Greece and the EU**. According to UNHCR, during the course of 2019, Greece registered 59,726 sea arrivals and 14,887 land arrivals. In 2020, this number decreased to 9,306 sea arrivals and 5,094 land arrivals as of November 2020[xvi]. While total numbers remained minimal, there was a slight increase in illegal crossings from Turkey to Italy (by sea) and Cyprus (by sea and through the Green Line), suggesting the emerging risk of new routes preferred by smugglers. According to the DGMM (Directorate General of Migration Management Turkey) figures, 4,282 migrant smugglers have been apprehended in 2020.

Afghans, Syrians and Pakistanis continued to top the list of irregular migrants intercepted in Turkey in 2020. These were followed by nationals of Iran, Iraq, Palestine and Georgia. The break-down by nationality reveals that the decrease in the overall number of irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey in 2020 mainly stems from **Afghan nationals**, whose **number of detections fell by 82%.** While, the number of irregular Afghan migrants intercepted in Turkey reached more than 200,000 people in 2019, double that from the previous year; there is no similar increase in the number of international protection applications by Afghans in Turkey. This suggests problems regarding registration but also that many Afghans consider Turkey rather as a country of transit, *en route* to Europe.

A total of 31,334 applications for **international protection** were lodged in Turkey in 2020, with the decline in numbers for two consecutive years attributed to both the impact of Covid-19 and the DGMM having to shut down numerous services and/or function in limited capacity for the most part of 2020. A breakdown by nationality of international protection applicants reveals that Iraqis have topped the list in recent years until 2019 when Afghans have taken over the top position.

Turkey: Applications for International Protection					
2016	2017	2018		2019	2020
66,167	112,415	114,537		56,417	31,334

Source: Department of Migration Management (DGMM), Turkey

Meanwhile, the number of victims of **human trafficking** increased in 2020, despite the overall slowdown in irregular migration. A total of 275 victims were identified in 2020 (as of 31.12.2020); compared to 215 in 2019[xvii.] Out of a total 1,189 victims identified between 2015-2020 (as of
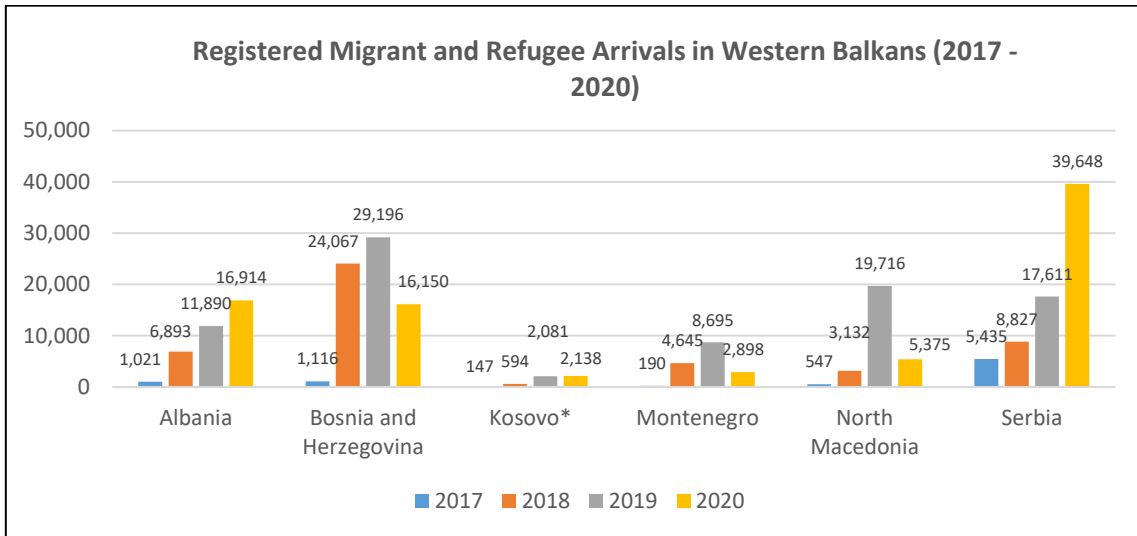
02.12.2020), the disaggregated data per type of exploitation shows that sexual exploitation is the highest with 727 victims, followed by labour exploitation (226), forced begging (120), child marriage (65), forced captivity (27), forced marriage (14) and other (10)[xviii].At the same time, due to its geographic location and its' stance as a mid-income country, Turkey does not only attract irregular migration, but also **appeals to an increased number of legal migrants.** The number of foreigners obtaining a residence, study or work permit in Turkey through existing legal pathways have steadily increased during the past decade. In 2020, there were a total of 886,653 foreigners residing in Turkey legally under different types of residence permits. This includes 586,304 under the Short-term Residence Permit, 83,427 under the Student Residence-Permit, 76,649 under the Family Residence Permit, and 129,566 under other types of residence permits[xix]. A break-down by nationality reveals that in 2020, Iraqi citizens constituted the largest group of foreigners with residence permits in Turkey, followed by Syrians, Turkmens, Azeris and Iranians. Istanbul remains Turkey's main hotspot for legal migration, with 371,820 foreigners residing in the province in 2020[xx].

Historically characterized by the emigration of its citizens, the **Western Balkans** has in the last 5 years witnessed an increasing trend of migrants and refugees transiting through the region. Ever since mixed migration flows into the region started to grow in 2015, the so-called Balkan Route has become one of the main routes for migrants and refugees, coming mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria and Morocco[xxi], travelling through Turkey and Greece, and trying to reach the EU. As a result of the EU and Turkey Statement reached in March 2016 and the closure of borders, smuggling and illegal crossing of borders became the predominant way migrants entered and transited the Western Balkan countries on their way towards the EU.

In 2015, the greatest pressures had been on Northern Macedonia and Serbia, with migrants moving towards Hungary. However, upon reinforcing protection of the Hungarian border, the route shifted towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, following mainly a route from Greece through Albania and Montenegro. In 2020, the **Western Balkans** remained a transit route for mixed flows of migrants on their way to reach their final destinations in EU countries. The number of registered migrants and refugees in the region has increased significantly in recent years and has remained high despite measures related to the prevention of Covid-19.
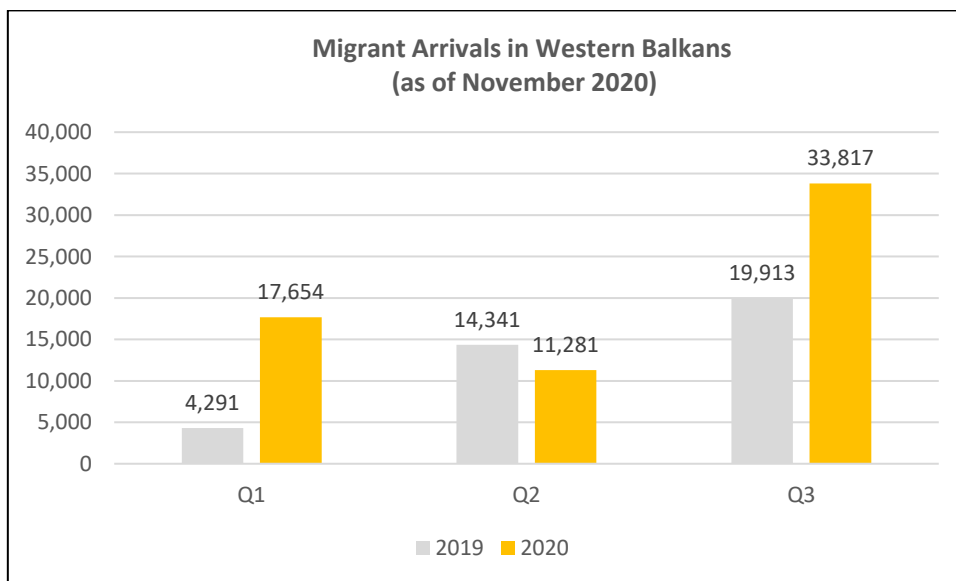
Registered Migrant and Refugee Arrivals in Western Balkans (2017 - 2020)

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Albania	1,021	6,893	11,890	16,914
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,116	24,067	29,196	16,150
Kosovo*	147	594	2,081	2,138
Montenegro	190	4,645	8,695	2,898
North Macedonia	547	3,132	19,716	5,375
Serbia	5,435	8,827	17,611	39,648

Source: IOM and National Authorities (January 2021); https://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals.
All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Each of the Western Balkan countries faced a significant increase of newly registered migrants and refugees in particular in 2019 compared to 2018. Even during 2020, the number of registered migrants and refugees was considerably high, with Serbia registering nearly 40,000 new arrivals. Other countries reported a decrease in the numbers in comparison to 2019, most likely due to measures against Covid-19 and change of migration routes within the Western Balkans. When comparing the number of arrivals as registered by IOM, it is evident that the trend decreased in the second quarter of 2020, while increasing again in the following period.

Migrant Arrivals in Western Balkans (as of November 2020)

	2019	2020
Q1	4,291	17,654
Q2	14,341	11,281
Q3	19,913	33,817

Source: IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), November 2020;
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Q3%202020%20Narrative%20Overview_final_0.pdf, retrieved on 07.12.2020

Despite a decrease in detections of illegal border crossings at the beginning of the pandemic, attempts of illegal border crossings at EU external borders increased again as of early summer 2020. The overall number of detected illegal crossings or attempts increased by more than 100% in 2020 as compared to 2019. Data for detected smuggling cases are not yet available for 2020, but it is assumed that migrants are using, in an increased manner, the services of criminal groups to cross the borders. An increasing number of refusals of entry and the application of accelerated procedures for asylum seekers at the borders with neighbouring countries were reported especially by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, but also by North Macedonia.

While borders were closed and transiting further to EU countries remained extremely difficult, from the of 22,020 migrants expressing their intention to request asylum in the Western Balkans in 2020, only 4,633 applied for international protection, corresponding to 11%[xxii].

Due to the increased number of stranded migrants, reception capacities of the region were under pressure to accommodate migrants while also being challenged with preventing Covid-19 outbreaks in the reception centres. The Western Balkan countries are also facing humanitarian and security challenges, along with challenges related to the access to rights for refugees and migrants, particularly for vulnerable groups. All countries in the region have developed response plans to manage mixed migration flows, and they have made progress by opening new temporary reception facilities, expanding the existing ones as well as undertaking measures aimed to protect migrants from the pandemic and prevent its spread in the reception facilities, as it is confirmed by the 2020 annual reports of European Commission. However, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains critical, and the EC Country Report 2020 for Bosnia and Herzegovina[xxiii] highlights the needs of the country to develop a targeted contingency plan to be able to cope with the influx of migrants and refugees.

4. Migration policy developments in the region

In 2020, tensions rose at the Turkish-Greek border over the implementation of the **2016 EU-Turkey Statement**. In late February-early March 2020, Turkey announced the suspension of the Statement, allowing irregular migrants to exit Turkey with the aim of crossing to Greece and Bulgaria while maintaining that the EU is not adequately fulfilling its share of the 2016 Statement.[xxiv] In response, Greece and Bulgaria closed their borders leaving refugees trying to pass in limbo[xxv]. During the crisis, both Turkey and Greece claimed violations of fundamental human rights and refugee rights on the other side of the border[xxvi]. Tensions were subsequently overcome. On 1 October 2020 the European Council held a strategic discussion on Turkey and adopted conclusions reaffirming the strategic interest of the EU for a stable and secure

environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and further in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. This was proposed to include continued cooperation on migration issues, in line with the March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement.

Despite of political tensions, the **resettlement of Syrians under temporary protection** under the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement continued in 2020. A cumulative total of 27,579 Syrians were resettled from Turkey to an EU Member State by end of 2020, within the framework of the One-to-One Mechanism. With the outbreak of Covid-19, Turkey introduced a de-facto suspension of readmission operations from Greece due to precautions against the pandemic. At the end of 2020, the total number of irregular migrants readmitted by Turkey from Greece within the framework of the One-to-One Mechanism stood at 2,139. The nationality breakdown of the readmitted persons is mainly composed of Pakistanis and Syrians.

There were continued challenges in 2020 to develop **durable solutions** for the vast number of refugees that Turkey has been hosting. Turkey continued to support voluntary returns to the safe zone under construction in northern Syria. In October 2020, the Turkish Minister of Interior announced that Turkey's cross-border operations enabled the return of more than 414,000 Syrians[xxvii], while authorities suggested that about one million Syrians are expected to return to northern Syria once a safe zone is established[xxviii]. Provision of citizenship to Syrians was also on the public agenda. In December 2019, the President of Turkey declared that some 110,000 refugees were granted Turkish citizenship, and that the government planned to provide citizenship to many more Syrians[xxix].

Meanwhile, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, in July 2020 the DGMM published a long awaited update of the 2018 "Harmonization Strategy Paper and Action Plan" laying out a road map to further enhance the **local integration of refugees**, notably Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. The Strategy also aims to strengthen coordination mechanisms among relevant actors, including CSOs. CSOs have long been providing services to migrants and refugees in Turkey. As part of efforts to strengthen cooperation with civil society in the field of migration, in early 2020, the DGMM established a Civil Society Unit under its Department of Migration Policies and Projects, which is responsible for ensuring increased cooperation and a broader outreach to CSOs.

With respect to the concerns of Syrians, an overarching goal remains to increase the rate of **voluntary returns**. In 2020, Turkey has taken further steps to establish a National Assisted Voluntary Return (NAVR) Mechanism. A protocol was signed in September 2020 among the DGMM, TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Turkish Red Crescent – the largest CSO with public benefit status in Turkey, for operational cooperation in the conduct of AVRs[xxx].

Moreover, Turkey continued to invest in further strengthening the cooperation among relevant stakeholders in the National Referral Mechanism for **prevention of trafficking in human beings**. A dedicated protocol is under preparation between the DGMM and the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Security (MoFLSS). Shelter capacity for victims of trafficking were increased with the opening a third shelter in Aydin (on top of two existing ones in Ankara and Kırıkkale). Turkey has also been stepping up its international cooperation and partnerships to combat trafficking in human beings. In October 2020, Turkey signed a Security Cooperation Agreement with Serbia, which includes intensified cooperation on migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

In recent years, countries in the **Western Balkans** mobilised further resources to develop or revise existing responses or contingency plans to manage mixed migration flows and developed action plans to manage the migration situation in the region. Migrants have been also included in the Covid-19 response plans, although no specific policies have been developed to address the pandemic among the migrant population.

All Western Balkan countries have strategies related to migration management in place, including strategies on combating irregular migration, integrated border management (IBM), anti-trafficking strategies, etc. Some of the strategies have expired with new ones not yet adopted. While the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has not been addressed by the development of specific migration related policies yet, ensuring protection of migrants against Covid-19 has been addressed in all country contingency plans related to fighting the pandemic among the general population. As regards migration strategies as such, the main aims are the improvement of border management, the suppression of illegal migration and the fight against the smuggling and trafficking of human beings. Most strategies are harmonised with relevant EU regulations in the area of migration and cooperation on the prevention and control of irregular migration and readmission.

Table 1: Key strategies related to migration[xxxi]

Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo* *All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
National Strategy on Migration 2019-2022	Strategy on the Area of Migration and Asylum and Action plan 2016-2020[xxxii]	National Strategy on Migration and Action Plan 2019-2023[xxxiii]	Strategy on Integrated Migration Management 2017-2020	Resolution on Migration Policy and Action Plan 2015-2020	Strategy on Combating Irregular Migration 2018-2020
IBM Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2020	IBM Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2018	IBM Strategy 2019-2023	IBM Strategy 2014-2018	National IBM Development Strategy 2015-2019	IBM Strategy 2017-2020
National Strategy on the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2018-2020	Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2013-2015 and Action Plan 2016-2019	National Strategy Against Trafficking in Human Beings in Kosovo* 2015-2019	Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2019-2024	National Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2017-2020	Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings 2017-2020

5. Conclusions for 2021

The **Covid-19 pandemic** of 2020 has deeply affected migration in the region surrounding **Turkey**. Although incrementally, the number of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey continued to increase. With an already crumbling public health infrastructure, and further deterioration of the economy (culminating in the collapse of the Syrian pound in June 2020), there is a risk that the humanitarian situation in parts of Syria will worsen even further. This could trigger **fresh migratory flows from Syria towards Turkey** in 2021.

For the first time in years, in 2020, Turkey registered a decline in apprehensions of irregular migrants, which was also reflected in a decrease in secondary movements towards Western

Balkans and the EU. With the likely continuation of lockdowns (full or partial) and strict border measures into 2021, this trend is likely to be maintained. Nevertheless, it can be expected that once there is relative return to normalcy, there will be a renewed increase in migration in the region. Given the bleak geopolitical and economic outlook in the **main countries of origin and transit which were further** exacerbated by the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, **forced migration from those countries to Turkey could easily return to or surpass pre-pandemic levels** once current restrictions to mobility are lifted. A post-pandemic scenario whereby the number of irregular migrants in Turkey would rapidly surpass the 2019-level, would overwhelm Turkey, whose capacity to host refugees and manage migration is already stretched to its limits.

Meanwhile, given the ongoing restrictions in mobility across the region and the disruption of asylum procedures in EU countries (main destination countries for migrants in Turkey), **the number of irregular migrants 'stuck' in Turkey may become even higher in the coming years**. While in recent years applications for asylum in the EU have increased, the number of rejected applications have also increased. The general trend suggests that there may not be a substantial change in the asylum recognition rates to the EU countries. This may result in **higher numbers of Afghans and others**, aiming to reach the EU through Turkey and in so doing, becoming **permanently stuck in Turkey**.

Human trafficking remains a major challenge in Turkey, with a rise in both trafficking for sexual exploitation and for labour exploitation. While the numbers of victims of sex trafficking (mostly female) continue to be at their highest, from 2015, there has been a serious increase in the number of identified victims of human trafficking for forced labour and forced begging in Turkey. The Covid-19 pandemic may further exacerbate this trend having put women and girls (migrants) at further risk of domestic servitude or sexual exploitation.

The Covid-19 pandemic is also expected to have significant implications on the **livelihood of migrants** in Turkey. The decrease in public revenues, leading to a decrease in public expenditures and social assistance, is already having its toll on the employment and income of migrants. It is likely that the burden of austerity measures will be asymmetrically shared among different populations, also implying that the impact on migrants may be further. The pandemic is also likely to have a protracted impact on CSO activities in the field of migration and overall service provision to refugee populations in Turkey. Constraints on CSOs' face-to-face service provision will further affect refugee's access to rights and services. Improving business support services for migrant businesses, re-skilling and up-skilling initiatives for migrant communities, and encouraging formal employment of migrants must be important policy directions in 2021.

In view of the above, in 2021 Turkey's migration policy will have to develop solutions in two parallel strands. Turkey should be prepared to take measures which **tackle short-term**

developments and continue mid- to long-term work to further strengthen its migration management. The need to adopt **further special measures to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic** on migrants and refugees, and to address increased risks for social cohesion, should remain as **an immediate priority**. It is also essential to closely monitor protection needs and gaps, and to support CSO efforts in this respect in facilitating the adoption of necessary measures.

In light of the pre-Covid-19 trend of rapidly increasing migratory pressure on the country, Turkey needs to develop **pro-active policies to avoid a possible backlash** in a post-pandemic scenario. Besides strengthening border and security policies, its capacity for monitoring and forecasting regional migration trends in order to enable a response to short-term developments, is of major importance. It is also crucial for Turkey to further improve its bilateral and regional **dialogues and cooperation with countries of origin**, **transit and destination** for a whole-of-route approach. Turkey is currently conducting ad-hoc dialogues with Afghanistan and Pakistan, for enhanced cooperation to prevent irregular migration and to facilitate returns. Efforts to further expand these dialogues with other countries such as Algeria, Bangladesh, Morocco, Iraq, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan need to be prioritized. **Making return policies more effective** also remains a priority for Turkey. Turkey needs to further build the capacities of national institutions with a particular role for the National Assisted Voluntary Return (NAVR) Mechanism to make voluntary return effective and more attractive for irregular migrants present in Turkey.

At the same time, Turkey will have to start re-assessing the future of the temporary protection status granted to Syrians, and to reflect upon possible **durable solutions**, given the protracted residence of Syrian refugees in Turkey. **Continued support of the international community, notably the EU**, for Turkey's efforts at developing durable solutions is of vital importance. While both Turkey and the EU have an interest in enhanced cooperation and further assistance for refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey, relations between the EU and Turkey and prospects of a revised EU-Turkey Statement in 2021 will have a direct bearing on the stability of the situation on the Turkish-Greek border. Revived high-level political dialogue between Turkey and the EU, and the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum announced in September 2020, affirming the EU's commitment to assist countries hosting large refugee populations, could offer fresh prospects.[xxxiv]

Concerning Turkey's anti-trafficking response, a key priority will be to improve the human and physical capacities through a victim-centred approach. A holistic approach focusing on Prevention-Protection-Partnership-Prosecution (4Ps) should continue. The continuance to **mainstream anti-trafficking efforts into broader migration legislation, policy and actions** is crucial, while ensuring equal attention on all forms of exploitation.

Finally, despite the steady increase of legal migrants to Turkey over the past decade, and the introduction of the Turquoise Card in 2016, which is a point-based identification system to

promote the employment of qualified foreign workers, Turkey still needs to define a clearly elaborated policy as to legal migration. A draft national strategy has been prepared and is pending adoption. It is foreseeable that once the Covid-19 pandemic subsides, there would be both increased immigration to and emigration from Turkey. At the same time, there may be an increased demand for migrant workers in Turkey in various economic sectors and key industries. Thus, in order to 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 conflict situation in Syria, developments in the Middle East and along the Silk Routes, and developments at the border between Turkey and Greece will continue to have an enormous impact on the size of mixed migration flows arriving in the **Western Balkans**.

The easing of Covid-19 measures and the opening of borders is likely to lead to **increased movements to and within the region**, as seen already in the second half of 2020. It is expected that the numbers of migrants arriving in the Western Balkans will further increase in 2021 and the following years, while the number of migrants stranded in the region will rise due to intensified border controls at the EU external borders. Continued new arrivals in the region are likely to lead to a persisting pressure on the region and at the EU external borders (Croatia, Hungary, and to some extent Romania), while at the same time the recently increasing number of refusals of entry will revert the pressure on Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia.

The region is already **facing pressures from accommodating a large number of stranded migrants**, in particular in areas near the EU external borders. With expected new arrivals in 2021, the region will likely face further challenges in terms of reception capacities and dignified treatment of migrants and refugees, in particular the most vulnerable groups, as well as ensuring adequate protection from Covid-19. The extended closure of borders and an increase in refusals of entry in some neighbouring countries, may lead migrants to **increasingly seek services from organized criminal groups** that facilitate smuggling with migrants, particularly, in countries neighbouring EU member states. This may also increase migrants' exposure to different forms of trafficking.

As figures for 2020 have shown, the number of asylum requests did not increase despite the higher number of migrants stranded in the region. It is also expected that in 2021 the Western Balkans will **remain a transit region**. **Policies for supporting durable solutions for migrants, including return, resettlement or integration are not yet sufficiently developed**. Host countries in the region cannot return migrants to the countries of transit and origin due to lack of agreements and protocols or their implementation. This will have an impact on the policies of the countries within the region to deal with migrants' presence. Most migrants are present with an

irregular status, which demands appropriate planning of financial resources for reception facilities, providing for migrants while in the country in line with international human rights standards, but also calls for increased cooperation with countries of origin.

6. Ten things to look out for in 2021

Turkey

- 2021 could witness a further increase in the numbers of forcibly displaced in the region, and fresh migratory flows towards Turkey due to the continued prevalence of conflicts and the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Forced migration from main countries of origin (notably Syria and Afghanistan) could easily return to or even surpass pre-pandemic levels once current restrictions to mobility are lifted.

- At the same time, 2021 will be marked by the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Turkey's economy, especially on certain sectors in which many immigrants are employed. This significantly increases the vulnerability of over 4 million migrants and refugees in Turkey. Special measures would be required to mitigate the adverse impact of the pandemic on those vulnerable populations, to further promote the local integration of Syrian and other refugees and to address increased risks for social cohesion.

- The loss of jobs and opportunities, and the exacerbation of economic hardship, may lead to an increased interest in emigration from Turkey (of citizens and legal migrants) towards the EU and other prosperous regions/countries.

- Relations between Turkey and the EU are likely to remain difficult for both sides. Turkey can be expected to seek additional EU assistance for refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey, and for the EU (and other resettlement countries) to further increase resettlements from Turkey. Support by the EU and the international community for the development of durable solutions for the vast number of Syrians under temporary protection and international protection applicants in Turkey will be ever-more important.

- Given the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the sharp increase in unemployment across the region, it is likely that cross-border human trafficking will increasingly manifest itself in 2021 and beyond, posing a bigger challenge for Turkey. Fostering regional and international cooperation will become all the more important to address risks and vulnerabilities.

Western Balkans

- Developments at the Turkey-Greece border in 2021 could continue to impact new arrivals in the region. An EU response to the migrant situation in both of these countries is of importance for avoiding the further influx of migrants transiting via Western Balkans and heading towards the EU; an influx increasingly facilitated by organized criminal groups / smugglers.

- Effectively addressing the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on migratory movements remains crucial, with a higher migration pressure on Turkey and the Western Balkans. Equal treatment of and care for migrants should be ensured in all local policies. With increased pressure on Western Balkan countries in accommodating the needs of stranded migrants, the opening of new temporary reception centres will be needed especially in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to enable the accommodation of asylum seekers and migrants. Special attention should be paid to vulnerable migrants, to ensure adequate accommodation and treatment for migrants infected with Covid-19 and for the planning of stranded migrants to be included in regional health care plans.

- In the view of recent developments, most of the Western Balkan countries should update their strategies related to migration management to strongly focus on combating the smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Cooperation among the countries of the region should be a keen focus, particularly in the areas of border management, combatting smuggling, trafficking and irregular movements, and in relation to data exchange and dialogue with countries of transit and origin.

- Higher numbers of migrants present in some countries have resulted in increasingly negative perceptions of migrants. Governments need to proactively plan for dealing with potential conflicts with the local population, specifically at locations close to the EU borders, and focus on ensuring a distribution of migrant centres throughout the respective country. It is also necessary to avoid the concentration of high numbers of migrants in only few locations.

- The Western Balkans should focus on improved cooperation with countries of transit and origin for the purpose of improving the identification of migrants and an adequate status determination. The readmission agreements signed so far by individual countries should come to life. The work on completing new agreements with countries of origin of migrants present in the region should be enhanced. While the numbers of requests for international protection remain low in the Western Balkan countries and the vast majority of migrants strive to move on to the EU, local governments should also start looking into durable solutions, while the EU should strongly support efforts of countries in the region to deal with higher numbers of mixed

migration flows. This should also include supporting the development of durable solutions, especially in view of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

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