

## MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

by ICMPD Turkey

### 1. Introduction

From a perspective of the migration-development nexus, Turkey is currently considered as both a destination country and country of origin for migrants. Hence, both the socio-economic integration of refugees and legal immigrants, as well as the linkages between Turkey and Turkish citizens living abroad and diaspora are highly relevant in the Turkish context. While the effective integration of migrants into the Turkish economy is significant for development, the contributions that Turkish citizens living abroad and diaspora can make to the development of Turkey through their network relations, the implications of these networks on relations between Turkey and -host countries as well as other factors such as remittances are equally important in the migration-development nexus.

In the past decade, Turkey's main approach to the migration-development nexus and related policies focused on four areas, namely development sensitive migration –attracting talent and attaining skills, utilizing capacities and networks of Turkish citizens abroad and diaspora, socio-economic harmonization of refugees in Turkey, and effective governance and cooperation for migration-development and levelling down adverse effects of illegal and excessive migration.

### 2. Recent Trends and Developments

The negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world economy has been reflected in the same manner on the Turkish economy. After positive growth experienced at the beginning of 2020, the Turkish economy is expected to contract by 5% to 8% at the end of 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic, including job losses, decrease in external demand and income shortfalls, leading to an investment and output decline.<sup>1</sup> As the pandemic affects other countries, remittances from diaspora is also expected to drop sharply due to loss of wages, which will have a further negative impact on the Turkish economy.

In response, in 2020 Turkey has been trying to deal with the negative economic impact of the pandemic and the changing business models, reorganization of value chains and changes in demand for certain products, sectors, occupations and skills, the reorganization and digitalization of production and social services. At the same time, Turkey is also trying to address the social implications of the pandemic, including social distancing, limited mobility and reduced travel, changing urban environment along with the psychological effects of the

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<sup>1</sup> OECD. June 2020. "Turkish Economic Snapshot". Economic Forecast Summary. <http://www.oecd.org/economy/turkey-economic-snapshot/>

pandemic on the society. While these dynamics have been affecting the entire country, migrant groups are more vulnerable to the adverse effects due to a variety of reasons.

The Covid-19 pandemic led Turkey to introduce restrictions on travel and brought the administrative procedures related to legal migration and international protection to a halt for a period in 2020, as international passenger flights were suspended from March until June 2020. This has jeopardized the ability of Turkey to fully implement its policies regarding attracting highly skilled migrants to the country, as outlined in the 11th National Development Plan. Moreover, temporary as well as permanent closure of businesses caused loss of income and employment for both the host community and migrant groups, increasing vulnerabilities.

The number of work permits granted refugees in Turkey remain very low due to the high rate of irregular work among refugees, despite a new regulation enabling access of refugees to the labour market for adopted in 2016.<sup>2</sup> In 2020, the vulnerable and unfavorable employment conditions of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey continued with, illicit and long hours of work with low payment often lacking basic security at work, particularly in low skilled jobs.<sup>3</sup> These challenges are associated with the problems related to the socio-economic integration of Syrians, which also create skills mismatches and the discouragement of younger generations from pursuing further education. Covid-19 pandemic's negative impact on the economy causing loss of jobs and income has strongly been affecting migrants as they work informally or without job security.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have significant implications in Turkey on the migration-development nexus in 2021 and beyond. Although there are still uncertainties regarding the exact scope, severity and duration (short to long-term) of the effects of the pandemic on economic, social, technological and governance domains; the trends explained above are expected to continue and become more evident in 2021.

Gradual economic recovery is expected in 2021 in Turkey; however, there will be a need for special measures to mitigate the effects on vulnerable groups, including migrants, which are heavily affected by the pandemic. The decrease in public revenues, leading to a decrease in public expenditures and social assistance, may put migrants at the risk of facing even harsher conditions in terms of livelihoods. It is likely that the burden on economic measures will be

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/3.5.20168375.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> ILO. March 2020. "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market". [https://www.ilo.org/ankara/publications/WCMS\\_738602/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ankara/publications/WCMS_738602/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/12/18/world-bank-provides-financing-for-viable-micro-and-small-firms-in-turkey-amid-pandemic>

asymmetrically shared, meaning that migrants may be more strongly affected by the current situation. Due to the prevalence of informal forms of employment among migrants, their livelihoods are expected to decrease even further and the discrepancies between the migrants and the host community may increase in 2021 and beyond.

Businesses owned by migrants are affected by the pandemic the same way as any other local business, and face the risk of temporary or permanent closure. Coupled with the loss of income and rising unemployment in households, this could lead to a lasting impact on the migrant community in Turkey, which will need to be mitigated with special measures in 2021.

The digitalization of products and services, particularly on the governance side, may offer new solutions for the integration of migrants into the host community. However, measures regarding social distancing and prejudices against migrant groups may increase ghettoization in urban areas, which must be taken into consideration and countered through targeted policies.

Reduced travel and limited mobility is curbing current migration flows. Emigration rates may also be partly affected in 2021. This situation creates a challenge in terms of attracting talent and skilled migrants while also decreasing the number of irregular entries to the country. The reduction in the application of residence and work permits and the decrease in the arrival of skilled migrants may have an adverse impact on the Turkish economy. Yet, considering the rising unemployment rates for the local community, it would be important for local authorities to tighten international labour admission.

Once the restrictions are lifted, an increase in international mobility and migration flows, both regular and irregular are to be expected. The adverse effects of the pandemic are also likely to be heavier on developing countries, which may create new and sudden migration flows to Turkey in the form of irregular and forced migration. Turkey, considered as a politically stable country with relative economic success, will likely stay as an attractive destination for migrants in the medium to long term in the post-Covid era.

#### 4. Policy Recommendations

- Further advancing the socio-economic integration of migrants, including the close to 4 million Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey, should be a priority of migration and development policy-making in 2021. This will not only contribute to the overall development as well as sustainable and inclusive growth of Turkey, but will also improve the well-being of migrant communities

and social cohesion in the society. Improving business support services for migrant businesses as well as re-skilling and up-skilling initiatives for migrant communities should also be important policy directions in 2021. Decreasing informality and encouraging formal employment of migrants will be crucial for their socio-economic integration as well as their overall contribution to the Turkish economy. Through a major EU funded project (Enhancer) promoting entrepreneurship, ICMPD is providing support to Turkey for the work in the area of socio economic integration of Syrians under temporary protection.

- To attract international talent, it will be essential to develop policies to manage labour migration in line with health protection measures in the short term. For this purpose, it will be vital for Turkey to determine the target migrant groups in line with its legal migration strategy and develop necessary plans and policies to attract these groups.
- To counter the alienation and ghettoization of migrants in urban spaces, public services including transportation, the organization of public spaces and public events must include measures to facilitate inclusion and mobility for migrant groups. This will be particularly important as in most cases, the migrant communities work in jobs that do not allow them to telecommute, increasing the health risks related to their employment.
- Additionally, a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach is needed in order to strengthen the coordination between relevant central and local stakeholders in order to facilitate sustainable, evidence-based and development-sensitive migration policy development. ICMPD is specifically focusing on increasing institutional knowledge and the formulation of migration policies at the regional level taking into account the local dynamics while maintaining an open dialogue with the central level actors. As migration and development nexus is a multi-layered topic and beg for the involvement of multiple actors, it is crucial to bring all relevant parties around the same table. This in itself is both a challenge and opportunity in the field of migration and development.

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