Since the EU and Turkey sealed a migration deal in 2016, millions of refugees have been living on the fringes in Turkey. Without long-term solutions, they will continue to risk their lives by embarking on new, dangerous routes to Europe.

Close to two years after the migration agreement came into effect on 18 March 2016, very little progress has been made on the promises given to Turkey as part of the deal: the visa liberalization scheme, EU accession talks and negotiations over a customs union. These unfulfilled promises and strained relations have led President Erdoğan to threaten to open the borders towards Europe to the millions of

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The 2016 migration deal has redirected migrants and refugees on to new, more dangerous paths. The EU must remain vigilant in its work to prevent suffering and deaths along the new routes.

- The EU must help to create viable futures for the Syrian refugees in Turkey, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also to manage future migration to Europe. This includes access to schooling, jobs and housing.

- The EU must ensure that new third-country partnerships do not represent a withdrawal from the obligation to protect and receive refugees.
Without much media attention, a 911-kilometer long wall has been constructed along Turkey's borders with Syria

This fence has created a situation in which Syrian refugees fleeing the ongoing war have to rely on human smugglers not only to traverse militia-controlled areas inside Syria, but also to pass the increasingly militarized Syrian-Turkish border.

refugees in Turkey. In June this year, this scenario was repeated by Interior Minister Soylu when he suggested sending 15,000 migrants a month to Europe in response to growing tensions. At the same time, EU leaders headed by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel have been highly critical of recent developments in Turkey. Merkel recently suggested cutting Turkey's pre-accession funds due to the deteriorating human rights situation and failing rule of law in the country, especially after the failed coup attempt in June 2016.

Mutual criticism aside, the EU-Turkey deal on migration seems to be holding for now, though migrants are continuing to arrive in Greece in numbers that resemble the situation prior to the large 2015 influx. In fact, the 2016 EU-Turkey deal marked an end to the already declining inflow of refugees and migrants that shook Europe.

For the EU, the narrative that it was taking action and ending the eastern Mediterranean migration route was of central importance in attempting to deescalate the growing political divisions in Europe over the so-called migration crisis. Meanwhile, Europe has spent the past two years fortifying the Balkans with fences and barbed wire, making a repeat of the 2015 situation unlikely even if Turkey were to open its borders.

Turkey's new border wall

However, it is not only the European countries that are building fences in the wake of the migration crisis. Without much media attention, a 911-kilometer long wall has been constructed along Turkey's borders with Syria, officially to prevent new terror attacks in Turkey and stop illegal smuggling, but also to control the movement of refugees. When the wall is completed at the end of 2017, it will be among the longest border walls in the world, close to the length of the wall on the US-Mexican border. In addition, Ankara has started building a new wall on the Iranian border, and a wall on the border with Iraq is in the pipeline.

This fence, together with Turkey's visa restrictions for Syrians crossing by air or sea, has created a situation in which Syrian refugees fleeing the ongoing war have to rely on human smugglers not only to traverse militia-controlled areas inside Syria, but also to pass the increasingly militarized Syrian-Turkish border.

Incidents have been reported of people attempting to cross the border having been shot or pushed back across it. This situation puts Europe's own policies in the spotlight. During a field trip to Turkey made by one of the authors in September 2017, a civil servant at the EU delegation in Ankara acknowledged the dilemma.

THE EU-TURKEY AGREEMENT

- Since 2016, migrants and asylum-seekers arriving in Greece whose applications have been declared inadmissible or unfounded will be returned to Turkey.
- For every Syrian refugee returned from Greece to Turkey, a Syrian will be resettled in Europe from camps in Turkey.
- Turkey will enhance border management to prevent irregular migration.
- The EU promises Turkey 6 billion Euros to support refugees and improve the humanitarian conditions.
- Turkey has been promised visa liberalization to the EU, renewed accession talks and new negotiations on the customs union.
in the ongoing dialogue with the Turkish authorities about the refugee situation. Europe’s own policies of closing its borders to refugees, she said, makes it difficult to argue that Turkey should maintain an open border policy and respect the principle of non-refoulement.

New migration routes opening
Moving from Ankara to the city of Izmir on the Aegean coast, only a few traces of past events were observed. In 2015 Basmane, an old neighborhood in the inner city, was a bustling transit hub for refugees with a visible smuggling industry. Hotels and shops were selling life-vests, food and products to cater for the needs of the migrants and refugees waiting to cross. More than 800,000 people used the coastline in 2015 to cross the sea to the nearby Greek islands. Today, walking through the narrow streets, at first glance the refugees and the smuggling industry seems to have disappeared.

In one of the few remaining shops that still sell life-vests, the owner told us that he has only sold 200–300 this summer, a fraction of what he used to when the streets were full of men, women and children transiting to Europe. Yet, despite the Turkish police and coastguard intensified their efforts to clamp down on smugglers, they are still there, apparently adapting to the new situation and opening up new routes.

From January to November 2017, more than 25,000 migrants arrived in Greece. Obviously, these numbers do not represent an end to migration from Turkey, but rather a return to the numbers recorded between 2012 and 2013. This year, sixty percent of those how arrived
by sea to the overcrowded facilities on the Greek islands were women and children.

Following decreasing demand, prices for getting on a dinghy to the Greek islands have dropped from 800–1,000 Euros to only 300 Euros, primarily due to the considerable risk of being sent back or getting stranded. But for 5,000–6,000 Euros smugglers now offer to sail from Turkey to Italy on larger vessels and yachts. After the closure of the western Balkan route, Europol detected more than 160 trips on this route. From June to September 2017, 23 boats with a total of 1,363 migrants arrived in Italy from Turkey, and two more boats with 228 migrants arrived in Cyprus, all with Syrians on board. Furthermore, the long and dangerous Black Sea route from Turkey to Romania has also experienced increased movements recently. Between mid-August to early September, 2017, 834 people were caught by the Turkish coast guard on this route.

Growing humanitarian challenges in Turkey

For the most part, however, the Syrian refugees remain stranded in Turkey and cannot afford to move on. Some are waiting for family reunification. Others prefer to stay in Turkey in spite of the many daily challenges. Today, Turkey hosts the world’s largest refugee population with an estimated 3.4 million asylum-seekers and refugees, mainly from Syria, but also from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran as well as from a range of African countries. The share of women and children among the refugees is seventy percent. In comparison, in 2016 European countries hosted a total of 2.3 million refugees.

Due to Turkey’s geographical restriction to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which grants protection only to people of European origin, the large Syrian population cannot be granted asylum in Turkey but instead have temporary protection status, which on paper gives them basic rights such as access to health care, education and, since 2016, work permits. Currently, ninety percent of the refugees in Turkey live outside the camps and get by from working as cheap temporary labour in the large informal economy, often under precarious conditions. Several observers stress that, although Turkey has opened its doors to the Syrians and has attempted to handle the large numbers of people, institutionally it is not equipped to deal with the huge challenges of integration that lie ahead. For example, more than forty percent of the over one million Syrian children in the country have not yet been enrolled in formal education.

Moreover, there are also worrying signs of increasing social tensions and negative sentiments. Violence towards refugees is being reported, especially in areas with high numbers of refugees. The precarious social and legal situation on the ground in Turkey continues to lead NGOs and scholars to question whether Turkey is a safe third country for refugees.

Unless long-term solutions are found in Syria, as well as for the millions of refugees in Turkey, refugees will continue to create humanitarian challenges for both Europe and Turkey, possibly for generations to come. If the political and economic situation in Turkey deteriorates further, large disenfranchised groups of refugees are likely to remain a source of secondary migration to Europe in the near future. Men, women and children will continue to embark on the new dangerous routes opening up unless the necessary steps to improve the situation are taken.

FURTHER READING

Alpes, J. et al. 2017. Post-deportation risks under the EU-Turkey Statement: what happens after readmission to Turkey?

EU Commission 2017 : Seventh Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement