



## Decision Making on the Balkan Route and the EU-Turkey Statement

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>AVR</b>	Assisted Voluntary Return
<b>CCTE</b>	Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme
<b>DGMM</b>	Directorate General of Migration Management (Turkey)
<b>ESSN</b>	Emergency Social Safety Net
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IGO</b>	Inter-Governmental Organisation
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>JAP</b>	Joint Action Plan
<b>MEB</b>	Minimum Expenditure Basket
<b>MHC</b>	Migrant Health Centre
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>PICTES</b>	Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into Turkish Education System
<b>RICS</b>	Reception and Identification Centres
<b>TL</b>	Turkish Lira
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

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# Definitions

## Aspiration (migration)

A migration aspiration refers to the desire to migrate, based on the individual's conviction that it would be better for them to migrate than stay in the country of current residence (Carling, 2019). Migration aspirations can be measured in multiple ways, which may reflect an open desire for migration, a conditional willingness to migrate, a concrete intention to migrate, preparations to migrate, and/or a perceived necessity for migration (Carling and Schewel, 2018).

## Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection, and whose right to international protection has not yet been determined by the country in which they have submitted their application (in the case of countries of asylum with individual rather than group procedures for assessing claims) (IOM, 2019b).

## Border controls and closures

Border controls and closures are types of measures to enforce border management (see 'border management' below). In the context of this research, border controls seek to enforce refugees and migrants' compliance with the legal conditions of entry and stay in a country and may include, inter alia: visa requirements and associated procedures and checks; fences, walls and other physical barriers; and the interception, detention and pushbacks of irregular migrants by police and other relevant state authorities. Border closures may involve the use of these same measures, but may be considered a more extreme policy, in that they seek to completely prohibit the entry of migrants and refugees into a state's territory, with few or no exceptions. These definitions are the authors' own interpretation, based on the timeline of events compiled for the purpose of this research.

## Border management

Border management refers to the policies and practices which determine the extent to which (and ways in which) an international border is permeable to the movement of people. Border management therefore involves the administration of measures designed to regulate the authorised movement of people whilst preventing the unauthorised movement of people, including through the detection of persons responsible for smuggling, trafficking and related crimes and the identification of victims of such crimes or other persons in need of assistance or (international) protection (IOM, 2019b).

## Capabilities

Building on Carling's (2002) aspiration/ability model of migration, de Haas (2010) draws on the capabilities approach to human development to explain how, in addition to having the aspiration to migrate (see 'aspiration' above), an individual must also have the necessary capabilities to migrate. Such capabilities may include financial or material resources, social or human capital (Carling, 2019; de Haas, 2010).

## 'Containment' policy

The 'containment' policy refers to the 'geographical restriction' to which asylum-seekers on the Aegean islands have been subject since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. The 'containment' policy effectively turned the Aegean Hotspot facilities (see 'Hotspot' below) into closed centres, in which asylum seekers are detained until their status is determined (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018).

## External migration control

External migration controls are border controls targeted at migrants outside the borders of the state, for example to prevent unauthorised entries into the state territory, or to ensure quick removal (e.g. through readmission procedures) (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2015).

## Hotspot

The EU's 'Hotspot' approach was introduced to provide emergency assistance to frontline states (Italy and Greece) at the height of the so-called 'migrant/refugee crisis'. EU Hotspots are facilities set up for the initial reception, identification, registration and fingerprinting of asylum-seekers and migrants arriving at the EU's external borders by sea (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018).

## Human smuggling

Human smuggling is "the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident" (UNODC, 2000).

## Internal migration control

Internal control policies are border controls targeted at irregular migrants present within the border of the state. These are typically policies of deterrence and expulsion and can include controls on internal movement, police surveillance, workplace raids, employer sanctions, prohibitions on migrants' use of public services, detention and incarceration (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2015).

## Irregular migrant

A migrant is 'irregular' if their entry into, or exit from, a country of origin, transit or destination is not in compliance with the relevant national laws and regulations or international agreements (IOM, 2019b).

## Migrant

Following the MIGNEX definition, in this report we consider migrants to be "individuals who have moved away from their usual place of residence without foreseeing immediate return, regardless of the reasons for migration, their legal status, or the duration of their absence" (Carling, 2019). This research is concerned only with migrants who have crossed an international border. Whilst we acknowledge *inclusivist*

definitions which consider refugees to be a sub-group of migrants (Carling, 2019), in this report we do refer separately to migrants *and* refugees (see ‘refugee’ below) in order to acknowledge that the two population groups of interest in this research (Syrians and Afghans) have high rates of recognition for international protection in the EU (see Section 4, Methodology).

### Migration decision making

Migration decision making refers to the process by which an individual makes decisions relating to whether to migrate, when and how to migrate, and with whom to migrate (Carling, 2019).

### Migration policies

Migration policies are the “rules (i.e., laws, regulations, and measures) that national states define and implement with the (often only implicitly stated) objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of immigration flows” (Czaika and de Haas, 2013, p. 489). In addition to targeting immigration flows, migration policies may also seek to impact emigration flows, as well as integration, assimilation and development outcomes in countries of origin and destination (de Haas and Vezzoli, 2011; Kuschminder & Koser, 2017; Skeldon, 2007).

### Migration-relevant policy

Migration-relevant policies are policies without a migration consequence (de Haas and Vezzoli, 2011): they do not seek to impact migrants or potential migrants, but they can nonetheless have an effect on migration processes, for example by impacting the employment opportunities and conditions, healthcare and educational services to which migrants and refugees have access.

### Migration-specific policy

Migration-specific policies are policies intended to have a migration consequence (they seek to impact migrants or potential migrants) (de Haas and Vezzoli, 2011). Such policies may include border management policies (for example, visa

requirements and related procedures), and the rights given to refugees and migrants (for example, regarding access to employment, public education, healthcare and social security services).

### Refugee

According to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees a refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (IOM, 2019b). In this report, we use ‘refugee’ broadly for all persons entitled to international protection, according to the relevant national law and regional instruments in place in the countries in which they seek asylum (and which typically offer protection to persons who have faced armed conflict in their countries of origin).

### Securitization

The concept of securitization is used in this report to refer to the tightening of either or both internal and external border controls (author’s own elaboration). Securitization may therefore involve both the narrowing of opportunities for legal entry or stay, and the stricter deterrence and prevention of unauthorised entry and stay in a country.

### Trafficking

Human trafficking is defined by the UNODC as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation” (UNODC, 2000).





# 1. Introduction

In 2015, there were higher than normal migration flows from Turkey to Greece and then via the Western Balkans to other European Union (EU) countries, leading to what has been termed Europe's 'refugee crisis'. In November 2015, a Joint Action Plan (JAP) was developed between the EU and Turkey to 'stop the crisis'. The result of the JAP was the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, popularly known as the EU-Turkey Deal, on 20 March 2016. The EU-Turkey Statement has been a contentious policy that has created significant debate amongst actors within the EU. It is not the aim of this report to address the EU-Turkey Statement, but to examine how the package of policies associated with the Statement influenced refugees and migrants' decision-making in Turkey and on the Western Balkans route to Europe between 2015 and 2018.

It is important to stress that irregular transit migration flows have a long-established history in the Western Balkans and Turkey, dating back to the 1980s (İçduygu, 2000). This route has been used by multiple nationalities from the Middle East and Asia such as: Afghans, Iranian, Iraqis, Turks, and Pakistanis. There have been several changes in migration flows and policies over this time (İçduygu, 2000). In particular, the borders between Greece and Turkey have been heavily politicized. Key events have included Greece's construction of a 12.5 kilometre fence on the Evros River in 2012 which resulted in reduced flows across Greece's land border. However, sea arrivals from Turkey to Greece began to increase after 2012 and, as explained further below, peaked in 2015.

At the same time, not all migrants can be considered as 'in transit' on these routes. Turkey is a migrant sending, migrant receiving, refugee hosting, and transit migration country all at the same time. As a result of the outbreak of civil war in Syria, Turkey's role as a refugee-hosting country has become particularly significant: Turkey is currently hosting the largest refugee population in the world at roughly four million registered refugees. This includes roughly 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees and 370,000 registered non-Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2019b, 2019d). There is also estimated to be a large unregistered refugee population in Turkey that is excluded from these figures. Although 2015 saw a rapid growth in the numbers of refugees leaving Turkey to seek asylum in the EU, not all refugees and migrants want to move onwards from Turkey and this report will examine both decision making to move onwards and decision making to stay in Turkey.

This research aims to unpack the changing dynamics of the migration flows on the Western Balkans route including: the policy environment regarding the migration context on the Western Balkans route; the decision making of refugees and migrants to take this route (or not); and the overall aspirations and destination choices of refugees and migrants on this route. This report aims to address the interplay of policy dynamics and refugees and migrants' decision making, and to ascertain



how different interventions, including potential future interventions, may impact migration flows.

The primary research question guiding this study is: How can the fluctuations in migration flows on the Balkans route from January 2015 - December 2018 be explained?

The core sub-questions guiding this research are:

- What explanations are there for the sharp decrease in the number of refugees and migrants on the Balkans route even before the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect?
- What are the decision making factors of refugees and migrants when choosing to leave Turkey before and after the EU-Turkey Statement?
- To what extent do policy interventions impact refugees and migrants' decision making regarding routes and destination choices?

This report is divided into six sections. Section 2 provides an overview of the development of the Western Balkans route and the context of the EU-Turkey Statement. Section 3 gives a short overview of the key literature on migrants' decision making and presents the theoretical model used in this study. Section 4 details the methodology of the study and gives a short overview of the respondents. Section 5 presents key results on refugees and migrants' decision making factors for onwards migration or to stay in Turkey (inclusive of both aspirations and capabilities), both before and after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. Section 6 builds on Section 5 by further exploring the specific role of policies in refugees and migrants' decision making processes. Finally, Section 7 provides an overall summary of the key findings and conclusion to this report.

## 2. The Western Balkans Route to Europe and the EU-Turkey Statement

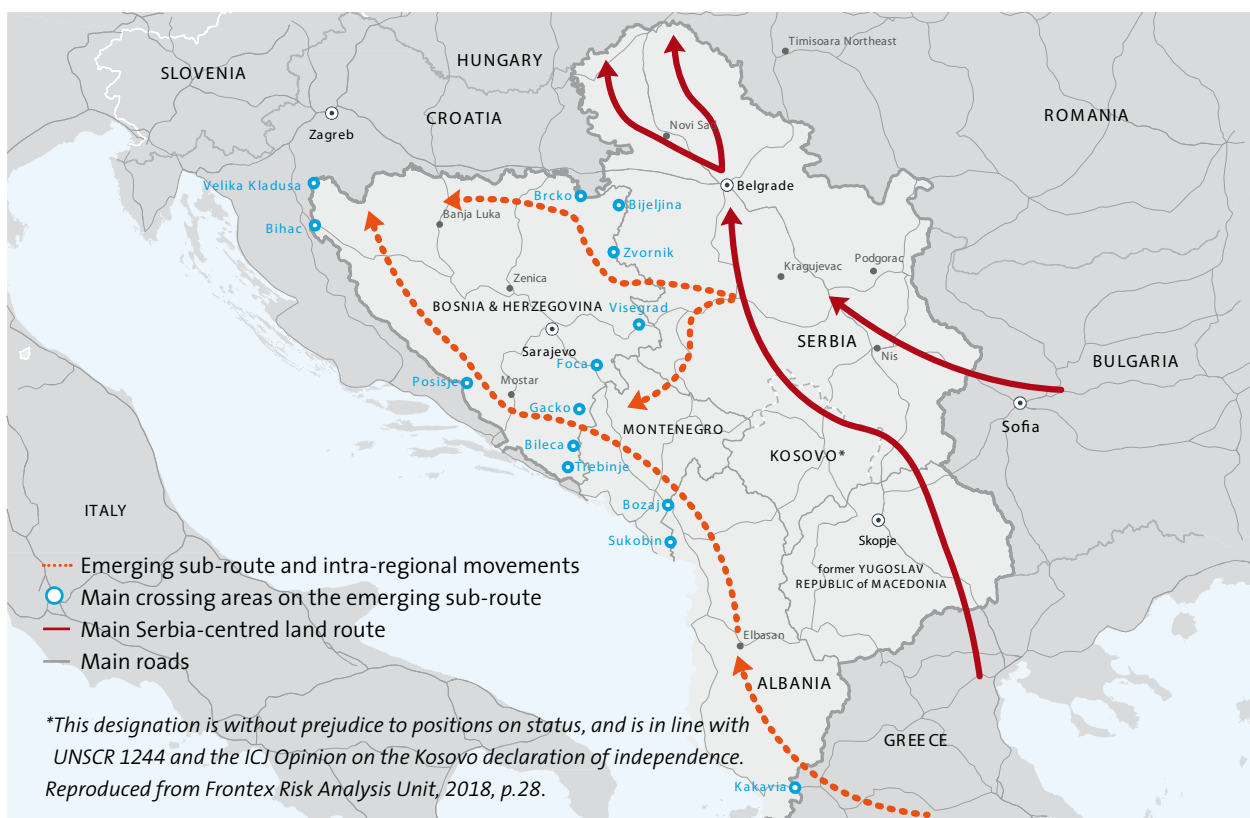
In 2015, the Western Balkans became the main route to Europe as refugees and migrants transited from Turkey to Greece and north to the Western Balkans via the Greece-North Macedonia border. The route was characterised by multiple events and policy interventions that led to changes in flows and crossing points, described in this section.

First, this section provides a brief overview of key events on the Western Balkans route in 2015, including the opening of the route in June 2015 and the eventual closing of the route in March 2016. Second, the section moves on to provide an overview of the EU-Turkey Statement, including its direct ambitions and implementation. The third part of this section provides a brief overview of the changing policy environment in Turkey. Finally, the section reflects on the collective role of these policies and events in the decrease in arrivals to Greece in 2016.

### 2.1 Western Balkans Route

This section discusses the Western Balkans route prior to early 2015, the opening of the route in June 2015, and the eventual closing of the route in early 2016. Figure 1 below shows a map of the Western Balkans route to Europe and the development of border fences along the route.

*Figure 1. Map of the Western Balkans route, including both the primary, Serbia-centred route, and the emerging sub-route through Bosnia and Herzegovina.*



#### 2.1.1 Status Quo in 2014 - Early 2015

A central defining element of the rising flows to the EU in 2015 was that 90 percent of arrivals were from either Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. The increase in flows is often attributed to the Syria crisis itself and, while it is clearly an important explanation, there were other compounding factors as well.

Conditions in both Turkey and Greece were poor for refugees and migrants. Greece was facing its own economic crisis. Refugees and migrants experienced many challenges in Greece as they were not provided with any forms of social support from the government. The government staff shortages and payment freezes to staff meant that the asylum service was regularly closed and people could not even apply for asylum. The economic crisis meant that a previously thriving informal economy was deflated and people also could not find informal work to support themselves. Resultantly, most refugees and migrants (regardless of legal status) wanted to migrate onwards. In a survey of 528 refugees and migrants in Athens collected from April-June 2015, 75 percent of respondents wanted to move onwards from Greece (Koser & Kuschminder, 2016). A significant influencing factor in this decision was poor subjective living conditions in Greece (Kuschminder & Waidler, 2019). Greece was thus viewed by refugees and migrants as a necessary point of transit to Europe, aptly stated as: "Greece is like a door, you go through it to get to Europe" (Dimitriadi, 2015).

The situation in Turkey was quite different to that of Greece in that many refugees and migrants viewed Turkey as a country in which to stay (at least until their return to Syria), and not just as a site of transit. This was clear as in 2015 Turkey hosted over two million Syrian refugees. However, conditions were declining for refugees in Turkey as the conflict in Syria grew longer. The resources that people initially brought with them to Turkey were depleted. Humanitarian assistance fell short of the scale of need, as inadequate funding meant that the Turkish authorities, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other aid organisations struggled to meet the needs of the growing refugee population in Turkey. Moreover, promises made by the Turkish government, such as regarding access to healthcare and education services, were not trickling down into a reality for many people. In 2015, an industry evolved in Basmane, a neighbourhood of Izmir, where smugglers openly facilitated sea journeys to Greece (Duvell, 2018).

As arrivals increased on the Aegean islands, people took ferries to the mainland, where there was little reception capacity in Athens. Movement onwards was difficult due to controls on the Greek-North Macedonian border (described below).

### 2.1.2 Opening of the Western Balkans Route

Prior to 18 June 2015, Greece's northern border with North Macedonia was heavily securitized and difficult for refugees and migrants to cross. Koser and Kuschminder (2016) found in their study that 39 percent of respondents had attempted to migrate onwards from Greece and these respondents had an average of 4.4 failed migration attempts. The main reason that respondents reported for being unable to migrate onwards was apprehensions by the police. This included both pushbacks at the border by North Macedonian authorities, and actions by the Greek authorities to prevent onwards migration (Koser and Kuschminder, 2016).

Several incidents drew significant media attention and contributed to a growing awareness of the migratory pressures in the Western Balkans and of the conditions and risks that refugees and migrants faced due to the heavy securitization. In April 2015, 14 migrants were killed by a train whilst walking along a railway track in North Macedonia, as a result of restrictions on the use of public transport by irregular migrants (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, 2015; Rolandi, 2015). This incident, alongside other reported fatalities, resulted in growing pressure on the North Macedonian government to facilitate the safe movement of refugees and migrants through North Macedonia (Rolandi, 2015; Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016).

In response, on 18 June 2015, North Macedonia introduced amendments to the Law on Asylum, which allowed asylum seekers to be in North Macedonia legally for 72 hours, with full freedom of movement, including the right to use public transport (UNHCR, 2015). In theory, the 72 hours enabled asylum seekers to formally submit their asylum application at

North Macedonia's Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers, but in practice it meant that refugees and migrants had 72 hours in which to transit through North Macedonia, without risk of detention or deportation, and facilitated by available public transport (Amnesty International, 2015). From 18 June 2015, the border was thus 'opened' and refugees and migrants were able to freely move onwards from Greece for the first time in years. At the same time, however, countries further along the route were taking steps to stem the flow of irregular migrants onwards from North Macedonia. On 17 June 2015, Hungary announced plans to build a fence along its 175 kilometre border with Serbia (Dunai, 2015). From 29 June 2015, joint patrols by Serbian, Hungarian and Frontex officers from Austria strengthened the policing of Serbia's border with North Macedonia (Amnesty International, 2015).

On 21 August 2015 North Macedonia declared a State of Emergency at both its southern and northern borders, and completely closed its southern border for two days (Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). Violent clashes occurred at border crossings, where military and paramilitary police were deployed to push migrants back and prevent their crossing (reportedly using teargas, stun grenades and baton rounds) (Amnesty International, 2016; Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). After this the government of North Macedonia started to organize train services to take refugees from a new reception in Gevgelija (on the border with Greece) directly to the Serbian border (Beznec, Speer, & Stojić Mitrović, 2016).

On 15 September 2015, Hungary announced a state of emergency and completed the construction of a 175 kilometre razor-wire fence on its border with Serbia (Kingsley, 2015). With this fence, Hungary took itself off the Western Balkans route, and re-directed flows through Croatia and then Slovenia, before reaching Austria as before. Faced with this sudden influx, Croatia closed seven of its eight border roads with Serbia on 17 September (BBC News, 2015a).

While EU policymaking focused on managing the influxes to frontline states, national governments in the Western Balkans both collaborated and competed to ensure that their respective countries did not become the sites of large bottlenecks of stranded populations along the route. On 18 October 2015 Slovenia, which had become a major transit country as a result of Hungary's recently completed border fence, declared that it would only allow 2,500 refugees and migrants to enter its territory from Croatia a day. Croatia asked Slovenia to accept 5,000 per day, but Slovenia refused based on Austria's decision to admit only 1,500 a day (BBC News, 2015b). These new border controls left thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in Croatia (BBC News, 2015b). Shortly after, on 3 November 2015, a joint agreement between Serbia and Croatia to transfer refugees and migrants through Serbian territory to Croatia began implementation. Several daily train services, carrying approximately a thousand refugees and migrants on each service, transported refugees and migrants directly from



Šid train station in Serbia to new temporary reception facilities in Slavonski Brod, Croatia, free of charge (Brunwasser, 2015; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2015). On 11 November 2015, Slovenia started the construction of a razor-wire fence along its border with Croatia to limit the inflows (Surk, 2015).

November 2015 saw the introduction of nationality-based profiling to restrict access to the route to only those nationalities deemed eligible for asylum in the EU. On 17 November 2015, Slovenia announced that it would only allow the entry of asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The next day, North Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia adopted the same policy. Thousands of refugees and migrants from other countries (or without documentation that could prove their Syrian, Iraqi or Afghan nationality) remained stranded on these borders, including an estimated 3,600 on the Greek side of the Greek-North Macedonian border (Smith, 2015; Teffer, 2015). On 28 November 2015, the tense situation on the Greek-North Macedonian border erupted into violence, as stranded refugees and migrants, including many Pakistanis, Iranians and Moroccans, protested the restrictions, clashing with police forces who used tear gas and stun grenades to control the crowds. It was reported that some Iranians sewed their lips together as an act of protest, and the first fatality on this border occurred when a Moroccan man was electrocuted when he climbed onto a train wagon (Behrakis, 2015). On 7 December 2015 Austria began the construction of a fence along its border with Slovenia (DW, 2015).

### 2.1.3 Closure of the Western Balkans Route

The reinforcing of border controls in Austria, Hungary and Serbia prompted North Macedonia to implement closures of the North Macedonian-Greek border between 20 January and 2 February 2016 (Agencies, 2016). On 8 February 2016 North Macedonia started the construction of a second fence on the Greek border (Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). On 21 February 2016 North Macedonia further restricted its nationality-based profiling, by prohibiting the entry of Afghans (Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). Further protests erupted on the Greek-North Macedonian border on 29 February 2016, where police used teargas to disperse the migrant population, and no-one was allowed to cross for the next two days (Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016).

On 9 March 2016 North Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia shut their borders and the Balkans route was declared closed, only days before the official implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, 2016a). On 14 March 2016 a group of 1,500 people, who were among the 12,000 refugees and migrants who had been stuck in informal camps at Idomeni on Greece's border with North Macedonia, set out walking in what was called a "March of Hope" to cross North Macedonia's closed border (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, 2016b; European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, 2016). Having successfully breached the border, they were pushed back to Greece by

North Macedonian military forces (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, 2016b; European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, 2016). At this time, only days before the official implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, the Western Balkans route from Greece northwards was effectively considered closed.

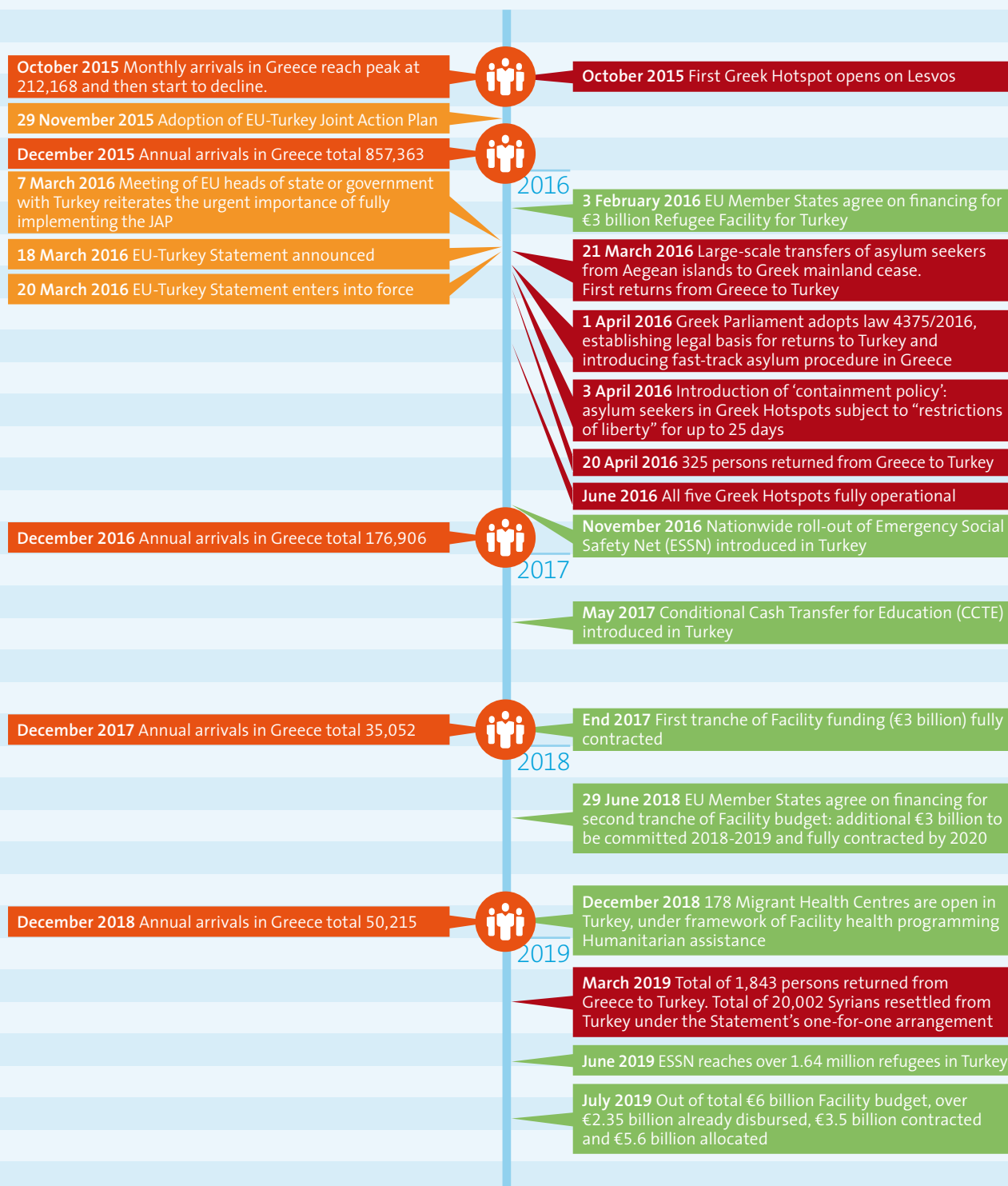
## 2.2 Overview of the EU-Turkey Statement and Policy Environment

The 29 November 2015 meetings between Turkey and the EU that resulted in the JAP can be considered as the preliminary start of the EU-Turkey Statement as the JAP resulted in immediate policy changes, implemented in Turkey and the EU, which were further developed in the March 2016 Statement. The EU-Turkey Statement was officially announced on 18 March 2016 and came into implementation on 20 March 2016. Therefore, the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement may be considered as three stages: 1) a preparation phase based on the JAP (29 November 2015 to 20 March 2016); 2) entry into force in March 2016; and 3) the longer-term implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement post March 2016. Each of these time periods will be discussed in more detail below.

The EU-Turkey Statement is comprised of two key components which can be characterised as external control policies and humanitarian assistance. The external control policies focussed on preventing onwards movement from Turkey. This was enacted as strengthened border controls by the Turkish authorities, which included controls on movement within Turkey towards the coast, and increased patrolling of the Aegean Sea and Turkey's land borders with Greece and Bulgaria. Additionally, the most notable aspect of the Statement's external control policies was the one-for-one arrangement, dubbed the 'swap policy'. According to this arrangement all refugees and migrants arriving irregularly in Greece were to be sent back to Turkey. In exchange for each Syrian refugee that Turkey accepted back, one Syrian refugee would be resettled from Turkey to the EU. The legal basis for the enactment of this policy was a long-standing readmission agreement between Greece and Turkey.

The second component of the EU-Turkey Statement aimed to improve reception conditions in Turkey for (particularly Syrian) refugees. Towards this aim, a six-billion euro Facility for Refugees in Turkey was established to provide humanitarian aid, improve access to educational services, and to promote the socio-economic integration of refugees in Turkey. In May 2016, the Steering Committee for the Facility agreed on six priority areas for the targeting of Facility funds: humanitarian assistance, migration management, education, health, municipal infrastructure, and socio-economic support. Programming in these priority areas has been implemented under two streams of humanitarian and development assistance.

Figure 2. Timeline of EU-Turkey Statement Key Dates



- Arrivals data
- Overarching policy development
- External control policy
- Humanitarian Assistance

Source: authors' own elaboration

### 2.2.1 Preparation Phase Building on the JAP

The agreement of the JAP between the EU and Turkey in November 2015 led to rapid policy changes, primarily in Turkey. First, Turkey increased border controls and surveillance on its coast and raided beaches and guesthouses to prevent the exit of migrants and refugees (Duvell, 2018; Hurriyet Daily News 2015). Raids were also carried out on factories producing dinghies and life jackets (Duvell, 2018). Second, on 8 January 2016 Turkey introduced new visa regulations which required Syrians entering Turkey by air or sea (typically via third countries such as Egypt and Lebanon) to have a visa, with immediate impact for some 400 Syrian refugees left stranded at Beirut airport (DW, 2016). These developments occurred alongside Turkey's existing efforts to close its border with Syria, as further detailed in Section 2.3.

The above policy changes and implementation by Turkey arguably led to a reduction in the number of irregular exits from Turkey by the spring of 2016. In other words, flows had already been reduced by these measures before the EU-Turkey Statement officially entered into force on 20 March 2016.

### 2.2.2 Entering into Force: Changes in Asylum in Greece

On 20 March 2016 the EU-Turkey Statement officially came into enforcement. The immediate implementation of the Statement's returns agreement relied on a number of policy changes in Greece, which dramatically impacted the asylum system and reception conditions in Greece.

In April 2016, the Greek parliament adopted a new national law on asylum called the Asylum Service (Law No. 4375 of 2016), widely regarded as the legal basis for implementing the EU-Turkey Statement through the introduction of the safe third country principle for Turkey and an expedited asylum procedure in Greece (European Parliament, 2016; Lehner, 2019). According to article 60(4) of the Asylum Service, the Greek Ministries of Interior and Defence are able to implement exceptional measures in the case of large numbers of arrivals (Heck & Hess, 2017). A fast-track asylum procedure was therefore set up to allow the immediate and expedited processing of new arrivals on the islands (according to the law, applicants have one day to prepare for the first instance interview and three days for a decision on an appeal) (European Parliament, 2016). The only exception was made for vulnerable applicants, who are allowed to claim asylum under the regular procedure (Heck & Hess, 2017).

In addition to the EU-Turkey Statement, the EU implemented other important policies that significantly impacted reception conditions in Greece. Most significant was the introduction of the Hotspots approach, first outlined in the May 2015 European Agenda on Migration and then identified in September 2015 as a priority action for implementation (European Commission 2016). The Hotspot approach was designed to help manage the disproportionate migratory pressures on the EU's external borders in Italy and Greece, where the "European Asylum

Support Office, Frontex and Europol will work on the ground with frontline Member States to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants" (European Court of Auditors, 2017). Collaboration between these agencies, and with Eurojust, was meant to further support Member States in the quick processing of asylum claims, the return of migrants not in need of international protection, and the effective dismantling of smuggling and trafficking networks (European Court of Auditors, 2017).

The roll-out of the Hotspots in Greece was slower than planned: five Greek Hotspots were due to be set up by the end of 2015 but by March 2016 only four of five were operational and, of these, only the Lesbos Hotspot was fully functional (European Court of Auditors, 2017; European Parliament Research Service, 2016). By June 2016 all five Greek Hotspots were deemed by the European Commission to be fully operational (European Court of Auditors, 2017). Although the Hotspots were initially conceived as reception and identification centres (RICS) for quick transit, the EU-Turkey Statement significantly impacted the development of the Hotspot approach in Greece. In order to implement the EU-Turkey Statement, another change to the Greek Asylum Service law introduced a new regulation according to which newly arrived asylum seekers were subject to "restrictions of liberty" for up to 25 days (European Parliament, 2016). The regulation was designed to prevent newly arrived asylum seekers from leaving the Hotspots, in order to ensure their swift return to Turkey under the one-for-one arrangement.

At this point, the interpretation of the EU-Turkey Statement was that it allowed only for returns to Turkey from the Aegean islands. Therefore, because returns from the Greek mainland could not be ensured under the Statement, asylum seekers were no longer transferred from the islands to the mainland. Whereas prior to the implementation of the Statement large numbers of asylum seekers had been transferred to the mainland, on 21 March 2016 these transfers ceased. 15,715 refugees and migrants were therefore left on the islands, stuck in "hotspots that transformed overnight into crowded detention facilities in poor conditions" (Dimitriadi, 2016, p. 3). In late 2017, due to poor conditions and severe over-crowding, some refugees were transferred to the Greek mainland. According to some interpretations, this only occurred because Turkey agreed to accept back irregular migrants from the Greek mainland (ECRE, 2017; Euractiv, 2017).

The restrictions of liberty introduced following the EU-Turkey Statement have been widely regarded as a policy of 'containment' by academics, NGOs, and the media. In this report, we consider this 'containment policy' to be part of the EU-Turkey Statement. This is because the EU-Turkey Statement created the impetus for the restrictions of liberty that Greece required in order to implement the Statement's one-for-one arrangement. Although the EU-Turkey Statement did not directly prescribe the restrictions of liberty within its original policy statement, this legislative change can be viewed as



following the spirit of the agreement. In this report, we do not further assess the Hotspot policy, which has received multiple criticisms from a human rights perspective.

### 2.2.3 Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement: March 2016- December 2018

Since the initial implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement there have been several developments with regards to returns, resettlement, the situation on the Aegean Islands, and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Each of these will be briefly discussed in this section.

#### Returns

The implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement began as planned: on 21 March the first returns of refugees and migrants from Greece to Turkey took place. However, subsequent reporting shows that the number of returns in the longer-run has been very low. At the end of March 2019, UNHCR reported that a total of 1,843 people had been returned from Greece to Turkey under the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement (UNHCR, 2019a). Pakistani nationals represent the highest number of returnees (708; 38 percent of total returns). Syrian nationals represent the second largest group of returnees (341; 19 percent), and Afghan nationals are the fourth largest group returned so far (105; 6 percent), after Algerian nationals (200; 11 percent) (UNHCR, 2019a).

#### Aegean Islands

As mentioned previously, new asylum policies introduced by Greece in order to implement the EU-Turkey Statement resulted in severe over-crowding on the Aegean Islands. Table 1 provides

an overview of the number of sea arrivals, asylum applications, official Hotspot reception capacity, and size of the migrant population on the Aegean islands at the end of 2017 and 2018.

It is clear that the refugee and migrant populations on the Aegean islands have significantly exceeded reception capacity, although the number of arrivals has markedly declined since 2015. This is because individuals who arrived on the islands from March 2016 onwards have often been stuck there since arrival, unable to leave. Reports have criticised the extremely poor conditions in which refugees and migrants are held on the Aegean islands and have called attention to the implications for their human rights, as well as the resulting deterioration in their mental health (Asylum Information Database, 2019; Ćerimović, 2017).

#### Facility for Refugees in Turkey

According to the third annual report on the Facility, the full first tranche of funding (3 billion) had been contracted by the end of 2017, with 1.4 billion for humanitarian projects and 1.6 billion for development projects or non-humanitarian projects (European Union, 2019). Figure 3 shows an overview of the proportion of the Facility that has been allocated to each priority area (based on contracted amounts). An audit of the Facility conducted by the European Court of Auditors in 2018 found that the Facility was helpful, but that it could be more efficient, did not focus enough on outcomes, and that funded projects were sometimes overlapping and lacking in coordination. It is not possible to provide an overview of all projects within this report, thus only key developments will be highlighted here.

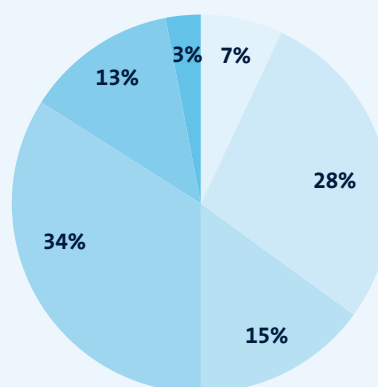
Table 1. Asylum Applications, Hotspot capacity and migration population on the Aegean Islands (combined); 2017-2018

	2017	2018
Sea arrivals to Greece	29,501	32,742
First time Asylum Applications in Greece	56,940	64,975
Total Greek Hotspot Capacity	5,576	6,438
Migrants Present on Aegean Islands End Year	14,020	14,399

Source: Eurostat, 2019b; Hellenic Republic, 2017a, 2017b; IOM, 2019a

Figure 3. Proportion of the Facility allocated to each priority area

7% Socio-economic Support    28% Education  
15% Health    34% ESSN  
13% Other Humanitarian Aid    3% Migration Management



Reproduced from: European Court of Auditors, 2018, p. 17

First, central to the implementation of the Facility's humanitarian assistance is the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), a cash transfer programme targeted at the most vulnerable refugees in Turkey. This is the largest humanitarian project ever funded by the EU, with a budget of €348 million and €650 million for its two respective phases (2016-2018 and 2018-2019) (European Court of Auditors, 2018).

Most ESSN beneficiaries are from Syria but there are also refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran who receive the monthly transfers. Beneficiary families receive 120 Turkish Liras (TL) (currently about 20 euros) per family member per month. The funding needed to cover beneficiaries' basic needs was initially estimated by the EU to be 180 TL per person per month (European Court of Auditors, 2018). However, following discussions with the Turkish authorities the cash transfer was set in 2016 at 100 TL per person per month and then increased in June 2017 to an average of 133 TL per person per month (European Court of Auditors, 2018). It has not since been adjusted for the high rates of inflation (European Court of Auditors, 2018). The recipients of the ESSN cash transfer tend to live in the poorer areas of Turkey's towns and cities. As of January 2019, over 1.5 million refugees had been reached through the monthly cash transfer programme, representing almost a third of Turkey's registered refugee population (European Commission, 2019c, p. 10). However, due to the high unemployment rates and low wages faced by refugees in Turkey, and in the context of Turkey's recent economic recession, the ESSN support is becoming less effective in meeting the scale of need. In 2018 the European Commission reported recent findings from the World Food Programme (WFP) that showed that 57 percent of the 2.3 million ESSN applicants lived below the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) value and 71 percent were vulnerable (applicants had poor or borderline consumption, and/or used high risk coping and/or were not able to meet essential needs without assistance) (European Commission, 2018, p. 52). At the same time, the WFP reported increasing need among non-ESSN applicants, among whom multi-dimensional poverty rates increased from 52 percent to 68 percent between May and November 2017 (European Commission, 2018, p. 52).

Education is the priority area which has received the second-largest proportion of Facility funding. Of the 3.5 million Syrian refugees registered under temporary protection in Turkey in 2018, 1.6 million were children, and approximately one million were of schooling age (European Commission, 2018, p.15). The Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme (CCTE) was launched in 2017 to facilitate refugee children's access to formal education systems. In February 2019, the families of over 470,000 children had received CCTE financial support to encourage their children's school attendance (European Commission, 2019b, p.10). Similarly, by September 2018 the PICTES (Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into Turkish Education System) project had provided Turkish language teaching to almost 400,000 students, catch-up training to

more than 16,000 students, back-up training to more than 43,000 students, as well as professional training to more than 19,000 teachers and administrators (European Commission, 2019b p.11). Over the course of the Facility's implementation, school enrolment rates among Syrian children have increased substantially from 30 per cent in 2014 to 62 per cent in 2018 (European Commission, 2018, p.111). Nonetheless, in 2018 nearly 40 per cent of school-age refugee children remained out of school, with particularly low enrolment rates in secondary-level education (European Commission, 2018, p.111).

Third, health has been a key objective targeted by Facility funds. Syrians under temporary protection and other refugee groups (unregistered Syrians and non-Syrians with conditional refugee status) have different experiences in access to healthcare in Turkey. By law, this latter group has only limited access to emergency and preventive healthcare services for contagious diseases (European Commission, 2018). Although Syrians under temporary protection have de jure access to free emergency, primary, secondary and tertiary public healthcare services free of charge, they are only entitled to access public healthcare services within the province where they are registered (European Commission, 2018). Moreover, their effective use of public healthcare services is further constrained by significant informational and language barriers (European Commission, 2018). The SIHHAT project ('Developing Services Related to the Health Status of Syrians under Temporary Protection in the Republic of Turkey') is the Facility's central programme within the priority area of health (European Commission, 2019b). In order to improve access to healthcare services for Syrians under temporary protection, SIHAAT has set up 178 Migrant Health Centres (MHCs) which deliver primary and basic secondary healthcare services (European Commission, 2019b, p.12). Among a range of related investments in the delivery of health services at different levels, 3,034 healthcare staff will be recruited under SIHHAT (recruitment had reached 2,569 in December 2018; 69 percent of new recruits were Syrian nationals) (European Commission, 2018, p.13; 2019b, p.12). A particular emphasis has been placed on overcoming language barriers: to this end, 580 bilingual speakers have been recruited to provide interpretation in public hospitals (European Commission, 2018, p.12). Nonetheless, while recognising that this Facility programming represents a crucial investment in filling the gaps in access to (particularly primary) healthcare services for Syrians under temporary protection, a 2018 European Commission report warned that the scale and reach of these MHCs will not be adequate to meet the burden of need across Turkey's refugee population (European Commission, 2018).

Fourth, under Facility programming for socio-economic support (labour market access, vocational training and social inclusion) the European Court of Auditors state that progress in this area has been delayed due to disagreements between the Turkish authorities and the EU (European Court of Auditors, 2018). This is in spite of the general agreement among the stakeholders

interviewed by the auditors that the protracted nature of the crisis in Syria makes investments in supporting the resilience of Syrian refugees, and their participation in the Turkish economy and society, particularly important. It should be noted that the nature of Turkey's economy has important implications for the employment opportunities available to refugees. Turkey has one of the largest informal economies among OECD member countries: in 2018 it was estimated that 33 percent of Turkey's working population was employed in the informal sector (European Commission, 2018, p.10). Although they work in a range of sectors, most refugees and migrants in Turkey therefore work informally, particularly because their access to legal work permits is very limited (European Court of Auditors, 2018). In combination with the high competition for jobs in Turkey, this means that refugees and migrants in Turkey are highly vulnerable to exploitation, which manifests as poor working conditions and salaries, as well as child labour (European Court of Auditors, 2018). Although in January 2016 the government of Turkey introduced a new regulation to provide work permits for Syrians under temporary protection (expanded in April that year to give access to non-Syrians with other protection status), de facto access to these work permits is still very difficult. This is partly because work permits can only be obtained through employers, who therefore have to be willing to hire formally and to apply for the permit on behalf of the employee. The complex administrative procedures and high fee requirements for obtaining a work permit represent significant disincentives for employers. Moreover, refugees themselves often have limited knowledge about access to work permits in Turkey.

Other humanitarian projects have focused on protection projects such as ensuring the registration of refugees in Turkey (European Commission, 2019b). Non-humanitarian projects that have been funded under migration management include the returns of 212 Syrians and 1,076 non-Syrians from Turkey, and increases in the capacity of the Turkish Coast Guard (European Commission, 2019b) (see Section 6.2.3 for further detail).

### Resettlement

A total of 72,000 resettlement places were intended in the initial agreement. As of March 2019, a total of 20,002 individuals had received resettlement under the Statement's one-for-one arrangement (European Commission, 2019b, p.4). The DGMM refers cases for resettlement to the UNHCR, based on information from, and in consultation with, relevant provincial authorities (UNHCR, 2019c). The UNHCR then conducts a multi-stage resettlement review process, through which cases are selected to be put forward to countries of resettlement (UNHCR, 2019c).

Research has illustrated that there is confusion regarding the resettlement process amongst Syrian refugees in Turkey. According to van Liempt et al. (2017), Syrians in Turkey with temporary protection status are not allowed to apply for resettlement and their fieldwork revealed that very few

Syrians knew about the resettlement opportunity. Individuals who were resettled learned about the programme through family members living abroad or through local policymakers whom they contacted for help with problems that they experienced in Turkey (van Liempt et al., 2017).

In addition to these barriers to accessing resettlement under the one-for-one arrangement, other factors result in a gap between the number of Syrians put forward for resettlement and the actual number of arrivals. In the case of resettlement to the Netherlands, data indicates that this gap is due to cases in which: the nomination does not comply with the one-for-one arrangement and is then returned to UNHCR; the UNHCR withdraws the resettlement request; "no-shows" by nominees, or formal withdrawal by nominees (Government of the Netherlands, 2019). When one family member drops out of the process the entire family can be rejected. Research by van Liempt (2019) has found that a central reason for withdrawal from the resettlement process was that nominees were informed that, upon obtaining refugee status in the Netherlands, they would not be allowed to return to Turkey until they acquired Dutch citizenship. However, this finding suggests a concerning miscommunication or misunderstanding as Dutch law does not prohibit refugee status-holders from going to a third country - only to the origin country. This presents a clear case of reported misalignment between refugees' policy perceptions and the policy's actual implementation, with significant consequences for refugees' decision making. Finally, in cases where individual members of larger family units, such as parents with adult children, are not eligible for resettlement with the rest of their family, this can be a difficult prospect to face and some families nominated for resettlement therefore choose to remain in Turkey where they can stay together (van Liempt, 2019). Although the resettlement programme is not the focus of this research, it is quite important for our consideration of refugees' and migrants' decision making as, if an individual knows and trusts that there is a legal pathway available, this is commonly far preferred to engaging in irregular migration movements.

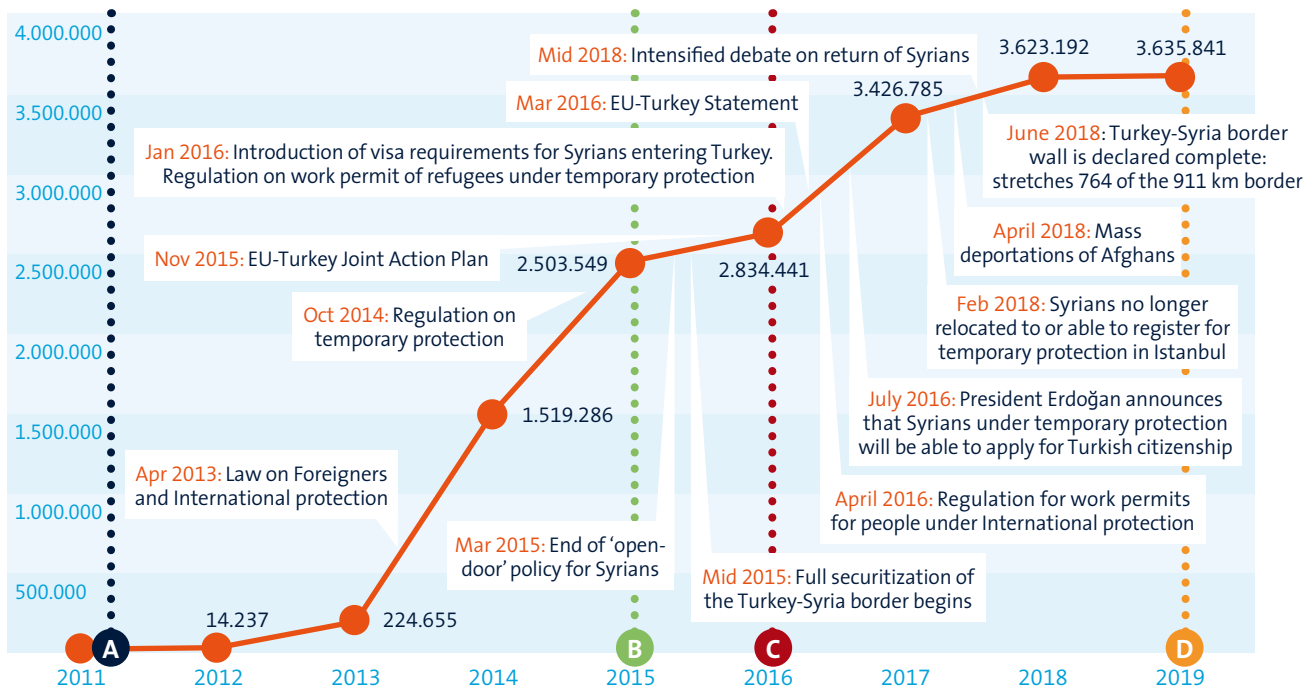
The policy environment and conditions for refugees in Turkey has changed over the past decade. Figure 4 below illustrates key policy changes alongside the increasing numbers of Syrian refugees registered in Turkey. Four distinct phases of the policy environment for refugees and securitization can be identified:

- A** Status-quo prior to 2011;
- B** Open-door policy and changing dynamics from 2011-2014;
- C** Securitization of borders starting in 2015;
- D** Political uncertainty, characterized by both policy initiatives to improve conditions for refugees through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, and persistent "permanent temporariness" (Bailey et al., 2002; İçduygu, 2018) due to the fact that Syrian refugees' legal status continues to be temporary.



## 2.3 Turkey Policy Environment and Conditions for Refugees in Turkey

Figure 4. The number of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection in Turkey and a timeline of key policies



Source: based on work by Ahmet İçduygu (using data from DGMM), with authors' own additions.

When the refugee flows from Syria began in 2011, Turkey's existing laws on asylum seekers and refugees were limited in scope and inadequate in terms of defining the rights of refugees in Turkey. Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees with a geographical limitation which means that only citizens of European Countries can be granted refugee status in Turkey. There were long-standing tensions regarding irregular migration from Turkey to Greece and a bilateral readmission agreement was signed in 2001. From 2002-2010, only 2,425 individuals had been sent by Greece and readmitted by Turkey (İçduygu, 2011), whereas over this same time period Greece claimed for 65,300 individuals to be readmitted to Turkey (İçduygu, 2011). In 2013, Turkey introduced a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection in order to establish an adequate legal and institutional framework to address the realities of mixed migration in Turkey, as promised in the National Action Plan on Migration and Asylum in 2005. The Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) was accordingly established as the central government authority for administering the registration, protection, detention, and deportation procedures as specified by the new law.

In 2011, at the start of the Syrian war, Turkey's response to the inflows of Syrian refugees was an 'open-door' policy based on the assumption that the war would end quickly (İçduygu &

Sert, 2019). However, the numbers of Syrians entering Turkey continued to rise and by mid-2015 there were over two million Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey. In addition to the refugee issue, the armed conflict in Syria had started to spill over the border into Turkish territory. In the context of increasing concerns regarding the autonomous Kurdish regions in Northern Syria and following a series of events that had affected the region since 2013, including ISIS-claimed terrorist attacks, the Turkish government gradually revoked its open border policy. Turkish policy moved towards a gradual and partial hardening of the border between 2013 and 2014, which included the erection of walls on some segments of the border (Okyay, 2017). Full-fledged securitization of the border followed in 2015, when the Turkish government stepped up measures to prevent irregular crossings at unofficial border crossing points through the erection of modular walls, barbed wire barriers, mobile watchtowers, and high-tech cameras at the borders (Okyay, 2017). By February 2016 the length of the wall was 80 kilometres, by September 2016 200 kilometres, and in June 2018 the wall was declared complete, stretching 764 of the 911 kilometre border (Aldroubi, 2018; Okyay, 2017).

In the current context Turkey's political situation has become more unstable, which is demarked by the failed coup attempt in July 2016, a currency crisis in 2018, and resulting high levels of inflation. These factors have all contributed to uncertainty

for refugees in Turkey, as a well as increasing the cost of living. At the same time, the implementation of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey have both had impacts on the lives of refugees in Turkey, by creating temporary legal stability and providing necessary humanitarian assistance. However, as noted above, the scale of these impacts appears to be insufficient and the increased political instability in Turkey may outweigh these positive policy developments. Syrians in Turkey do not have the permanent right to stay, despite the fact that many have lived in Turkey for over eight years. Their integration is thus hampered by the sense of ‘permanent temporariness’ that their insecure legal status creates (Icduygu, 2018). Afghans face greater insecurity: they are not eligible for the temporary protection status offered to Syrians in the context of their “mass influx”, and instead can only apply for “conditional refugee” status which gives no right to settlement in Turkey and which is, in practice, increasingly difficult to access (Üstübcü, forthcoming). It is well known that feelings of uncertainty and temporariness are instigators of onwards migration movement (Brekke & Brochmann, 2015; Duvell & Jordan, 2002; Heck & Hess, 2017).

Moreover, despite the Facility’s large-scale financial investments, living conditions are still challenging for refugees in Turkey. It has been argued that the Syrian crisis has been used by Turkey to gain bargaining leverage over the EU and that funds from the Facility have been targeted towards the state’s interests rather than bringing durable solutions to refugees’ lives (Gokalp Aras, 2019). Refugees continue to struggle to achieve basic living standards, access health, education and transportation services, overcome language barriers, and find viable economic opportunities (European Commission, 2019b).

Finally, both the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey afford different rights to Syrians and non-Syrians, which has created a significant gap in livelihoods between Syrian and non-Syrian refugees in Turkey. According to official statistics, the number of Syrians apprehended at the borders attempting to leave Turkey as irregular migrants have steadily declined year on year from 73,422 detections in 2015 to 34,053 in 2018 (DGMM, 2019). In comparison, the number of Afghans detected at the border attempting to leave Turkey has increased from 35,921 in 2015 to 100,841 in 2018 (see Figure 5 below) (DGMM, 2019).



## 2.4 Declining Numbers in Early 2016, What Role of the EU-Turkey Statement?

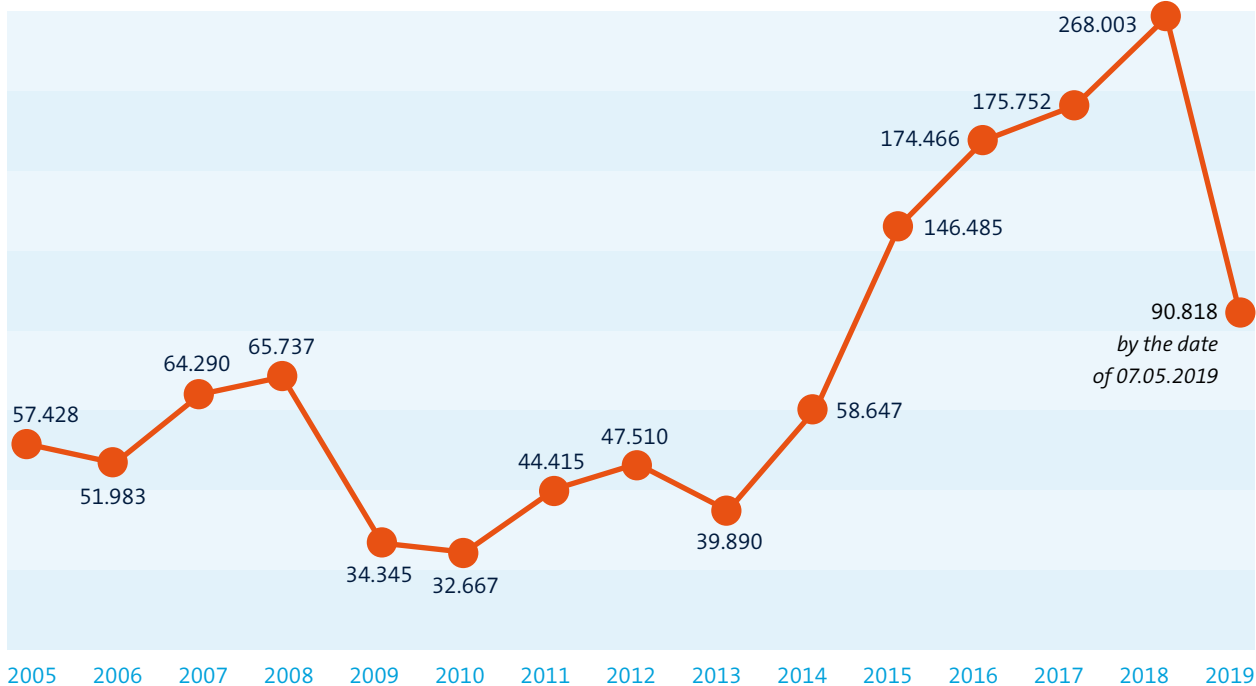
The primary goal of the EU-Turkey Statement was to address the so-called ‘European Refugee Crisis’, which in effect meant to stop irregular migration from Turkey to the EU, break the business models of smugglers and reduce casualties. At first consideration, the Statement was considered a large success as the number of arrivals were much lower in March and April 2016. However, further examination has challenged this assumption and raised the question as to whether the reduction in flows was attributable to the EU-Turkey Statement?

Arguments have been made that other factors were primarily responsible for the declining numbers of arrivals to the EU. These include the closure of the Balkan route as well as seasonal effects (difficult weather conditions in winter and spring) (Spijkerboer, 2016; van Liempt et al., 2017). Van Liempt et al. (2017) also suggests that the ‘natural’ development of asylum peaks tends to evolve into periods of lower flows. The authors argue that departures from Turkey to the EU slowed first because, by the time of the EU-Turkey Statement, most people who had to leave Syria had probably already left and, second, because the idea of being stuck in Greece was such an unappealing prospect that it deterred onwards movement to Greece among people who were prepared to wait or find another route (van Liempt et al., 2017). Duvell (2018) furthers this argument, stating: “many of those people who wanted to move on had already done so in 2015, while many of those who stayed may well have done so anyway” (p.11). In addition, Duvell (2018) argues that the enhancement of controls on the EU side and increased access to rights in Turkey may have influenced flows as well.

These arguments neglect a few key events occurring in Turkey at this time. First, the hardening of the Turkish border with Syria had an arguable impact on onwards migration movements from September 2015. In late 2015, international media began to report on how Syrians could no longer enter Turkey (Yeginsu & Shoumali, 2015). At the same time, research on Syrian arrivals in the EU in 2015 have shown that large numbers of respondents had left Syria in 2015 with short transit times (Crawley, McMahon, Jones, Duvell, & Sigona, 2016). Therefore, the hardening of the Turkey-Syria border may have had an impact on the flows upstream between Turkey and Greece.

Second to this, the government of Turkey had already begun to take action to prevent irregular migration to Greece, which was largely implemented after the JAP in November 2015 (see Section 2.2.1). This included raids of beaches and of factories making life jackets and dinghies, and new visa requirements for Syrians entering Turkey.

Figure 5. Number of irregular migrants who have been captured in Turkey by years



Source: DGMM, 2019

It can be suggested that factors that contributed to the decline in new arrivals to Greece that began in October 2015 may include the securitization and tightening of the Turkey-Syria border, and the increased securitization of Turkey's sea border with Greece – which was a result of the JAP and can thus be considered part of the aims of the EU-Turkey Statement. Therefore, the interplay of the closing of the Balkans route, increased restrictions in Europe, increased securitization of the Turkey-Greece and Turkey-Bulgaria borders (following the JAP), the closing of the Turkey-Syria border, and the winter season may all have contributed to the reduction in flows prior to the official implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016.

## 2.5 Summary

This section has aimed to provide a high-level overview of events along the Western Balkans route in 2015, the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, and the changing policy environment in Turkey. In reflecting on two key aims of this report, this section has sought to provide an overview of the different points in time that mechanisms of external border controls and internal migration control policies have been used in different relevant countries to control movement along this route. The final section has discussed the role of the EU-Turkey Statement in decreasing flows from Turkey to Greece in 2016 and highlights the role of the JAP in leading to the decline in arrivals to Greece. As discussed above, there are multiple factors that may have led to the decrease in arrivals in Greece in 2016 including: the closing of the Balkans route, increased restrictions in Europe, increased securitization of the Turkey-

Greece and Turkey-Bulgaria borders (following the JAP), the closing of the Turkey-Syria border, and the winter season.

Finally, it is important to again reflect on the role of decision making processes and migration aspirations in spite of these structural constraints. Research conducted in 2015 has demonstrated that high numbers of refugees and migrants wanted to move onwards from Turkey. Koser and Kuschminder (2016) found in a study of 528 Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian and Pakistani respondents in Istanbul that 59 percent wanted to migrate onwards from Turkey. Similarly, Duvell (2018) found that 45 of 60 respondents interviewed in Turkey in 2015 wanted to move on to the EU (p.4). Duvell (2018) notes that a core obstacle for interviewees in realising their migration aspirations was their lack of resources to move onwards, due to which they were 'stranded' (Collyer, 2010) or 'stuck' in Turkey (Schapendonk, 2012).

The aspiration to move on from Turkey was therefore high in 2015 and may in fact still be high. However, the extent to which migrants have had the capabilities to do so is a different question, particularly considering the greater restrictions on movement that began in late 2015 and were further strengthened following the November 2015 JAP and EU-Turkey Statement in 2016. This report further examines refugees and migrants' decision making factors to contribute to this discussion and investigate the extent to which the EU-Turkey Statement itself influenced the decision making of refugees and migrants.



### 3. Conceptual Framework for Examining Refugees and Migrants' Decision Making

A substantive gap exists in the migration literature on refugees and migrants' decision making factors once they are on route (Townsend & Oomen, 2015). There is increasing recognition that first, refugees and migrants' decision making is influenced by an array of complex factors arising between the destination and origin country (Hein de Haas, 2011; McAuliffe, 2013; Wissink, Duvell, & van Eerdewijk, 2013) and second, that refugees and migrants' decision making needs to be understood across each stage of the migration journey (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015; Kuschminder, 2018a; Townsend & Oomen, 2015; Wissink et al., 2013). As is widely shown in the literature, rather than eradicating irregular border crossings, control measures have made refugee and migrant journeys costlier and increased the time spent in interim destinations before reaching the 'intended' final destination. In other words, restrictive immigration policies have given rise to the emergence of transit spaces hosting different groups of refugees and migrants with or without initial aspirations for onward mobility (Collyer & de Haas, 2012; İçduygu, 2000; Üstübcici, 2018).

#### 3.1 Decision Making Processes in 'Transit' Spaces

Research on decision making within these transit spaces is growing and it is important to recognize that decision making in transit is distinct for three reasons (Kuschminder & Waidler, 2019). First, the initial impetus for the migration may have abated in transit. Particularly in reference to refugees, this means that if the initial trigger of the migration is no longer of concern individuals will be able to make decisions with more consideration than in a time of crisis. Therefore, refugees may choose to stay in the country of transit if they find immediate safety, or they may choose to migrate onwards if they are unsatisfied with the conditions in the transit country. Koser & Pinkerton (2002) highlight that transit countries or first countries of asylum in the context of forced displacement may allow for critical reflection time before making decisions to migrate onwards. In the context of forced displacement, the initial impetus for migration is the search for a safe haven. It does not mean that individuals and households with protection needs do not consider onward mobility.

Second, refugees and migrants may have access to new sources of information and social networks while in transit that can inform decision making. Collyer (2007) described the new connections made in transit as 'spontaneous social networks' meaning individuals encountered during the migration process that are a source of assistance and provide information to refugees and migrants on how to survive in transit, in addition to possible travel routes and destinations. Gladkova and Mazzucato (2017) examine the role of 'chance encounters' on decision making and future movement in transit. Chance encounters can determine the decision to move onwards or stay, or which route to take. Suter's (2012) research has shown the exploitative role of social networks in transit

due to the vulnerable conditions of refugees and migrants. Networks can thus have positive or adverse consequences for refugees and migrants in transit, and information must be filtered to discern what is factual or misguided. Similar to this, Snel, Engbersen, and Faber (2016) refer to migrant networks' 'gate closing' role, meaning that established co-ethnics in the destination country advise aspiring migrants to go elsewhere. This 'gate closing' role also recurs in other research conducted in the Netherlands among Syrian refugees. Some of them advise fellow countrymen not to come to the Netherlands, or are very selective in providing assistance ('gate keeping'). Various arguments play a part in this: the danger of the journey, the durable asylum procedure and the difficult integration in Dutch society. Finally, social media can also influence decision making and information access. The rapidity and frequency of connections over smart phones enables further access to information on routes, smugglers, destination choices, and overall decision making (Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018).

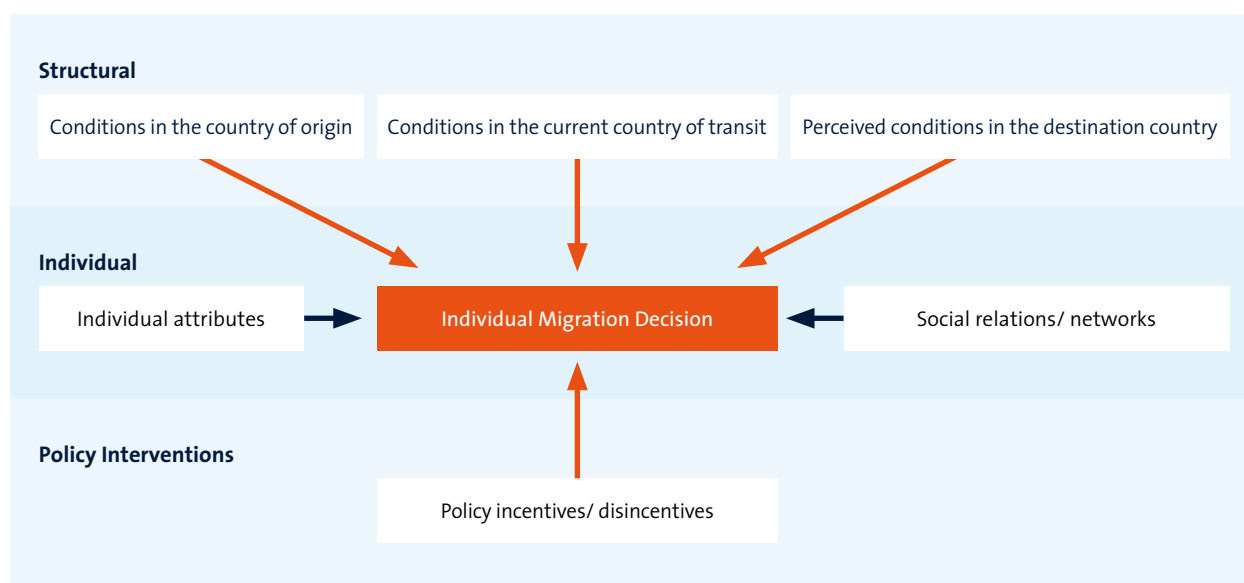
Third, capabilities may change in transit. A refugee or migrant may only be in a transit country because that is all that they could afford to get to for their migration, aptly stated by van Hear (2006) as "I went as far as my money would take me". In the transit country, an individual may have greater access to resources, for example, employment opportunities may allow refugees and migrants to generate enough income to finance their onwards migration (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2016; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016). For some, the initial intention to settle in the first country of asylum may be altered over time because of changing conditions in the context of reception as well as changes in one's capabilities and aspirations. This reflects on the critical link of capabilities and aspirations in the migration process, which is discussed further in the next section.

#### 3.2 Refugees and Migrants' Decision Making Factors: An Exploratory Model

Refugee and migrant decision-making factors represents the multiple and full complexity of factors that shape refugees and migrants' decision-making for when, where, and how to move. These factors are influenced by: conditions in the country of origin; perceived conditions in the country of intended destination; reception and incorporation conditions in the current country of stay or residence; access to information and social networks; individual economic resources and other capabilities; individual aspirations, human smuggling practices; and policy interventions. Refugees and migrants' decision making factors may change at different points in time and in different stages of the journey. They can be influenced by changing situations and chance opportunities.

Following from the work of Koser and Kuschminder (2016), this study will use the below model as a guiding framework for examining refugees and migrants' decision making factors in Turkey and the Western Balkans.

Figure 6. Model of Individual Migration Decision



Reproduced from Koser and Kuschminder, 2016.



The characteristics of each box above in the model includes:

**Conditions in the country of origin** - safe to return, duration of conflict, possibilities of peace deals in site, family and social ties in origin country;

**Conditions in transit** - living conditions, access to legal statuses, employment, education, and health services;

**Perceived conditions in the intended destination and on the journey to the destination** - living conditions, access to legal status, employment, education, and health services in the intended destination country and on the journey including: cost, risks involved, expected duration to the intended destination, perceived conditions at the in-between destinations;

**Individual attributes** - age, sex, family status, religion, ethnicity, migration aspiration and capabilities, duration of stay in transit;

**Social relations, networks, and human smugglers** - location of their networks, access to information, reliability of information, access and experiences with human smugglers, feedback loops, chance encounters;

**Policy interventions** - EU- Turkey Statement, border surveillance, police interventions, border closures, access to rights.

A strength of this model is that it accounts for the structural, individual, and policy level factors occurring across the micro, meso, and macro level within the complexity of decision making. A core limitation is that it only accounts for one moment in time; therefore reflecting an intended decision at that moment and not the realization of movement or actual behaviour of the individual. Second the model does not account for a hierarchy in decision making factors (Koser & Kuschminder, 2016).

In this study, this model will be used as a guide for the complexity of decision making factors. The emphasis of this work is to explore further the role that policy interventions do or do not have on decision making factors, recognizing that policy interventions do not occur in a vacuum and that decision making is simultaneously influenced by the complex array of factors presented above.

### 3.3 The Role of Policies in Refugees and Migrants' Perceptions and Decision Making Processes

The focus within this study is to examine how and the extent to which policy interventions, and specifically the EU-Turkey Statement, influence refugees and migrants' decision making factors. There is a common assumption that refugees and migrants make well informed 'choices' regarding when, where, and how they move (Crawley & Hagen-Zanker, 2019) and based on the welfare, residency and protection policies in different destinations (Kuschminder & Koser, 2017). This is exemplified by the notion of 'asylum shopping', (Bauloz, Ineli-Ciger, Singer, & Stoyanova, 2015), which was highlighted in 2015 by a Danish newspaper which published a table of information on reception conditions and durations and welfare entitlements for asylum-seekers. According to this newspaper, the table was used by smugglers to inform refugees and migrants about which European country to choose as their destination. This type of media portrayal exacerbates the assumption that refugees and migrants have detailed knowledge of migration policies in their intended destination countries, when research suggests the contrary (Crawley & Hagen-Zanker, 2019).

Previous research, however, contradicts this now popular view that refugees and migrants are highly informed regarding the policies and practices in their intended destination countries. It was found that newly arrived asylum seekers had little to no knowledge regarding policies shaping migration routes and destinations (Gilbert & Koser, 2006; Havinga & Böcker, 1999). At this time refugees and migrants relied heavily on smugglers as a central information source (Yildiz, 2017). It is well-recognized that current situations have dramatically changed with increasing technology use and information availability. Refugees and migrants with higher and lower levels of resources (in terms of human, social and financial capital) also differ in terms of their use of technology and engagement with information sources (Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018). The role of policies in refugees and migrants' decision making today is thus less clear as it is evident that more information is readily available and accessible to refugees and migrants, but it is unclear how they absorb, interpret and utilize this information.

When examining the role of policies in refugees and migrants' decision making it is important to specify that there are several different types of policies that can influence decision making. Policies that aim to combat irregular migration can be distinguished as either external or internal policies (Broeders & Engbersen, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2015). External policies are directed at refugees and migrants outside the borders of the state and can include border controls and readmission agreements (Broeders & Engbersen, 2007; Triandafyllidou,

2015). The one-for-one arrangement and the increased border controls implemented under the EU-Turkey Statement can be considered external control policies. Internal control policies refer to those that are practiced within the border of the state and can include: police deterrence and expulsion, employer sanctions, exclusion from public service, detention, incarceration and deportation (Broeders & Engbersen, 2007; Triandafyllidou, 2015). The new policies of the Greek government under the EU-Turkey Statement that have led to detention-like conditions on the islands can be considered an internal control policy.

Further to internal and external control policies, policies that arguably influence migration decision making can be considered either migration-specific or migration-relevant (Kuschminder & Koser, 2017; Vezzoli, 2015). Clearly, both policies that are intended to have a migration consequence - migration-specific policies - and policies not intended to have a migration consequence - migration-relevant policies - can have impacts on emigration and immigration flows (Hein de Haas & Vezzoli, 2011). Kuschminder and Koser (2017) put forth a typology of favourable migration-specific, adverse migration-specific, favourable migration-relevant, and adverse migration-relevant policies. The favourable/adverse distinction is often the flipside of the other, wherein favourable policies extend rights and adverse policies seek to remove rights and deter refugees and migrants. Examples of favourable and adverse migration-specific and migration-relevant policies are overviewed in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of Migration-specific and Migration-relevant Policies

	Transit Country	Destination Country
<b>Favourable Migration-specific Policy</b>	Protection visas (asylum or temporary protection status), right to work, opportunity for resettlement, regularisation	Protection visas (asylum or temporary protection status), right to work, opportunities for regularisation
<b>Adverse Migration-specific Policy</b>	No protection status, no right to work	Border patrols to restrict entry, information campaigns to prevent movement, return provisions and readmission agreements, detention and incarceration of irregular migrants
<b>Favourable Migration-relevant Policy</b>	Ability to work, democracy, social protection benefits, access to education, access to health care, language accessibility	Ability to work, democracy, social protection benefits, access to education, access to health care, language accessibility
<b>Adverse Migration-relevant policy</b>	Austerity measures that cut social care subsidies, undemocratic policies, employer sanctions and employment raids	Austerity measures that cut social care subsidies, employer sanctions and employment raids

Reproduced from: Kuschminder & Koser, 2017

Table 3. Overview of Migration-specific and Migration-relevant Policies and Contextual Variables in Turkey

<b>Favourable Migration-specific Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection</li> <li>• Open door policy with Syria (2011-2015)</li> <li>• Regulation on Temporary Protection for Syrians since 2014</li> <li>• Regulation on work permits for Syrians since January 2016</li> <li>• Facility for Refugees in Turkey since March 2016</li> <li>• Citizenship for selected Syrians since July 2016</li> <li>• UNHCR resettlement and, citizenship opportunities for certain nationalities</li> </ul>
<b>Adverse Migration-specific Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No refugee status for non-Europeans</li> <li>• Few regularisation opportunities</li> <li>• Increasing internal and external border controls in Turkey</li> <li>• Deportations from Greece under EU-Turkey Statement, detention, readmission agreements with third countries</li> </ul>
<b>Favourable Migration-relevant Policy and Contextual Variables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities in the labour market</li> <li>• Availability of housing</li> <li>• Widespread and loosely monitored informal labour market</li> <li>• Relative security compared to origin countries</li> </ul>
<b>Adverse Migration-relevant policy and Contextual Variables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer raids for detecting unauthorised workers,</li> <li>• Economic instability and stagnation since 2018</li> <li>• High inflation and relatively high cost of living</li> <li>• Political instability</li> </ul>

Source: authors' own elaboration



Table 3 shows a depiction of how the current policies in Turkey are considered within this framework. Contextual variables have also been added in order to depict the overall environment.

In conducting an analysis using this typology of refugees and migrants' decision making factors for onwards migration from Turkey in 2015 the authors' state:

"The favourable migration-specific protection policies significance for decision-making is offset by the adverse migration-specific policies of not being able to work or having permission to work or access health care... This highlights that even favourable migration-specific policies cannot overcome adverse migration-relevant policies in transit" (Kuschminder & Koser, 2017, p. 19).

This statement continues to reflect the current situation in Turkey, where the Facility for Refugees has improved conditions for refugees specifically, and particularly for Syrians, but has not out-weighted the adverse migration-specific policies.

### 3.4 Migration Aspirations and Capabilities: Placing Decision Making in Context

As discussed above, a key limitation of the decision making model is that it only accounts for a decision at a certain moment in time. These decisions can be "intended", when asked in a forward-looking lens (such as, what is your future plan?), thus reflecting an aspiration to stay or migrate. An aspiration reflects the desire or ambition for onwards migration or stay. Aspirations can be measured in multiple ways from an open desire, to an intention for movement, to a willingness or necessity of migration (Carling and Schewel, 2018). In this study, we have asked for migration aspirations openly as 'a plan for the future'. This means that while some respondents discussed their immediate or longer-term intentions, others talked about their aspirations which, they noted, they may be prevented from realising due to the obstacles they faced. This is because, in addition to an aspiration, an individual must have the capabilities to migrate: "People will only migrate if they perceive better opportunities elsewhere and have the capabilities to move" (de Haas, 2011, p. 16). Capabilities can affect future planning and if refugees and migrants do not have the ability to move onwards they may not aspire to move onwards; alternatively, they may have the aspiration to move, but lack the resources and ability to do so.

The analysis regarding the decision whether or not to move onwards from Turkey and the Western Balkans therefore reflects the respondents' intentions at that moment in time. As mentioned above, it must be emphasized that an aspiration for migration or a plan to migrate onwards does not necessarily result in actual movement. As no follow-up interviews were conducted with respondents it is not possible to know if their plans for migration were realised or not.

Second, decision making in this study is also assessed through a retrospective approach when respondents are asked to explain

the decisions and reasons for previous movement. In this situation the movement has clearly occurred and respondents can reflect on the entirety of their decision making process including their perceptions and constraints on their movement. However, these responses rely on retrospective memory, which can be fallible. Decision making cannot be measured precisely as there are inherent discrepancies with retrospective memory and, at the same time, a lack of information on whether and how plans are realised. This report therefore aims to reflect on the complexity of decision making, recognising that there are fundamental distinctions between the aspiration for movement, having the capabilities to act on the aspiration, and the resulting successful realisation of the movement. Of course, only when a refugee or migrant has both the aspiration and capabilities for movement, reflecting their decision to move onwards, would actual movement be expected to occur.

### 3.5 Summary

Limited research has been conducted on the role of policies in refugees and migrants' decision making processes, particularly in the current context of the EU-Turkey Statement. This report recognizes four important assertions from the literature.

- First, decision making is influenced by a complex array of factors, as illustrated in the model guiding this paper, and policies are one element within the larger complexity of decision making.
- Second, decision making is based on perceptions and information processing and consumption. Refugees and migrants' perceptions of any given policy or situation may then be factual, somewhat factual or completely misguided. This is of central importance when considering decision making, as decisions are taken based on these perceptions, which may in fact not reflect either the policy's actual intentions or implementation. This is a difficult issue to reconcile in research and policy formation and we have done our best to disentangle this wherever possible within the report.
- Third, policies are not all equal and different elements of policies such as internal or external control policies, or migration-specific versus migration-relevant policies can have different influences on migration decision making. Following on from the previous section, this report aims to un-pack the different components of the EU-Turkey Statement in order to explore how each part may or may not have influenced refugee and migrant decision making. Our analysis is restricted to focusing on the migration-specific policies in the current country and by destination countries (here focusing primarily on the EU as a regional actor). We recognize that other policies may have an impact on decision making, however, given the vast expanse of migration-specific policies introduced in the 2015-2018 time period in Turkey and elsewhere, we do not have scope within this study to go beyond these policies and the EU-Turkey statement.
- Four, decision making in this study either reflects a previous decision that has been implemented when a respondent has already moved, or reflects a plan at the time of interview to move or stay. The migration decision reflected at the time of interview does not mean that the migration was realized. This is unknown within this study as interviews were only conducted at one moment in time.

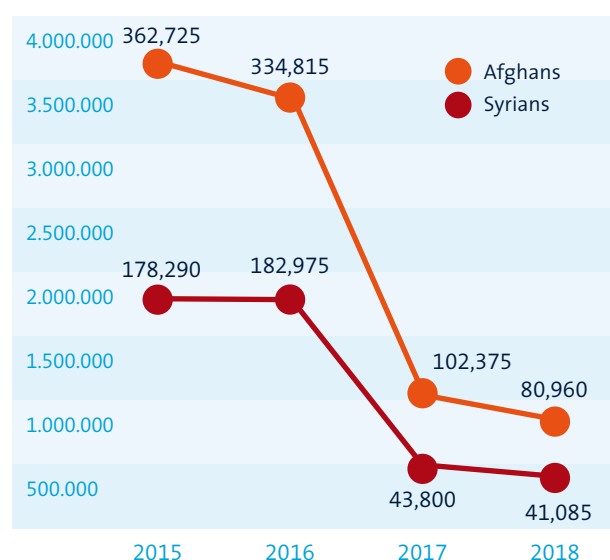
## 4. Methodology

The methodology for this study consisted of two main phases of data collection. The first was the reconstruction of a timeline of policies and events that occurred along the Western Balkans route between 2015 and 2018. The second was fieldwork to conduct interviews with refugees and migrants on the route and relevant key stakeholders.

### 4.1 Selection of Case Studies

In order to explore decision making at different points along the Western Balkans route, in-transit and at destination, four sites were selected for data-collection: Turkey, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Netherlands. As made evident in the previous sections, Turkey was selected for fieldwork given its position as the starting point for journeys to Europe and because it is the focal country targeted by the policies introduced as part of the EU-Turkey Statement. Serbia was selected as it has been a central country on the Western Balkans route to Europe and, as illustrated in the previous sections, has been affected by border closures on the route north and south of its geographical position. Bosnia and Herzegovina was selected in order to capture data on the sub-route that more recently developed through its territory in 2017 and 2018. Finally, the Netherlands was selected as a destination country for retrospective analysis of decision making. By sampling from these four case countries, which represent different positions along the route, and which offer distinct structural conditions for refugees and migrants, the research allows an exploration of how decision making may vary across geographical settings. Moreover, because the refugee and migrant populations currently present in these four countries vary in terms of when individuals left their countries of origin, and when they left Turkey (in the case of individuals interviewed outside of Turkey), the sample captures decision making processes at different points in time between 2015 and 2018.

Figure 7. Afghan and Syrian First Instance Asylum Applications in EU-28



Source: Eurostat, 2019a

Two nationality groups were selected as case studies for refugee and migrant decision making: Syrians and Afghans. As shown in Figure 7, both nationalities have had consistently high representation in the composition of mixed flows along the Western Balkans route and arrivals in Europe in general. In 2018, Syrians and Afghans were the two largest nationality groups seeking asylum in the EU (Eurostat, 2019b).

At the same time, Afghans and Syrians have different rights in Turkey, resulting in unique situations (Üstübici, forthcoming). This is discussed in the previous section with the emergence of the two-tier system in Turkey for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees. Further, Afghans and Syrians have different rates of recognition for protection in the EU. In 2018, the EU recognition rate at final decision was 94 percent for Syrians and 56 percent for Afghans (EASO, 2019). Due to the continued movement of both nationalities to Europe and the differences in rights and protection rates, these two cases have been selected for this study.

### 4.2 Timeline Methodology

The reconstruction of a timeline of relevant policies and events involved desk-based research to provide a detailed understanding of how the Western Balkans route developed between 2015 and 2018, and, in particular, to identify policy interventions and other events that may have affected the decision making of refugees and migrants on the route, or in Turkey and considering moving onwards along the route. Broad and inclusive criteria were used to identify potentially relevant policies and events, according to the researchers' knowledge, local experts' knowledge, and google searches. Information was drawn from media and news outlets, government outlets (policy documents and announcements), and from reports within the grey literature. Snowball methods were also used to find further events from relevant sources.

This process resulted in a timeline of 167 policies and events. This longlist was then reviewed to identify a shortlist of key policies and events that would more usefully inform the development of the interview methodology. The criteria used to create this shortlisted timeline were that included policies and events had to be either: 1) EU-level policy decisions that were: i) actually implemented; and ii) directly relevant to the Western Balkans route; or 2) Other events and developments that the research team hypothesized would have had a trickle-down effect on the daily conditions and reality faced by refugees and migrants on the Western Balkans route, and which may therefore have affected decision making. The resulting shortlist of 53 policies and events was then used to inform the interview methodology and both versions of the timeline provided important contextual understanding that underpinned the analysis and research findings. A more detailed timeline methodology can be found in Appendix 2.

### 4.3 Interview Methodology

In the second phase of the research, interviews were conducted in order to investigate and add depth to current understandings of the interplay between policy interventions and refugee and migrant decision making. As overviewed in Table 4 (below), in each field site interviews were conducted with: 1) refugees and migrants; and 2) other key stakeholders with insights into the changing migration dynamics along the Western Balkans route between 2015 and 2018.

Key stakeholders included national government representatives (from relevant ministries and agencies for migration, asylum and border security) and inter-governmental and non-governmental representatives from key IGOs, INGOs and NGOs active in the management and protection of mixed flows along the route (in Turkey, non-governmental interviewees also included a journalist and lawyer).

It should be noted that the IGOs, INGOs and NGOs contacted for interview in the Netherlands referred the research team onto their colleagues whose work has an international or regional focus (and were therefore best positioned to reflect on the evolving situation along the Western Balkans route), so these interviewees were generally not based in the Netherlands. A full list of key stakeholder interviewees is included in Appendix 1.

The interview guide for refugees and migrants focused on understanding the interviewee's migration experience (a migration lifecycle approach), from their initial decision to migrate, to their experiences and decision making en route, and finally their current situation and aspirations. Additional and innovative sections of the guide consisted of a set of: 1) targeted questions about the potential impact of key events and policy changes on the interviewee's decision making; and 2) a series of vignette questions which required the interviewee to imagine whether and how their decision making would change in response to a specific policy intervention. The interviews focused on understanding the case of the respondent and therefore not all vignette questions were asked to all respondents depending on the suitability to their situation and the perceived well-being of the respondent to answer such questions. The interview guides for key stakeholders focused on eliciting the interviewee's understanding of how and why mixed flows through the Western Balkans had changed between 2015 and 2018.

Fieldwork was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 4 and 9 February, in Serbia between 11 and 22 February, in the Netherlands between 21 March and 19 May, and in Turkey between 4 April and 2 May. Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted in person or over skype, at the interviewee's convenience. Interviews with refugees and migrants were conducted in person (or by phone for some interviewees in the Netherlands) and, where required, with the assistance of a translator.

In each field site, the research team sought, as far as possible, to ensure balanced representation of men and women, as well as refugees and migrants travelling alone (single migrants) and with family members (family migrants). It was not possible to screen for Afghans who had lived for much or all of their lives in Iran (or Pakistan), therefore the inclusion of Afghan research participants was based on whether they themselves identified as Afghan.

Respondents were selected based on a combination of purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, this was done by visiting and recruiting at nine migrant accommodation centres. In the Netherlands, the research team relied on their networks to snowball potential participants, as well as recruiting via intercept-points, and through the dissemination of informational flyers at asylum centres. In Turkey, intercept-point sampling and networks were again used to identify and recruit potential participants.

All interviewees gave their informed consent for participation. Written consent was obtained from key stakeholders, and verbal consent was obtained from refugee and migrant participants. Interviews were voice-recorded, where consent for this was given (which was the majority of cases). Interview audio files were later transcribed verbatim (and translated into English where necessary). In cases where consent was not given for audio-recording, the researcher took full notes of the interview discussion. The refugee and migrant interview transcripts (and notes, where these were taken) were systematically coded using Atlas.Ti, using a coding tree based on the interview guide and revised inductively in an iterative process.

Table 4. Interviewees across fieldwork countries

	Turkey	Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	The Netherlands	Total
Refugees and migrants	30	20	24	22	96
Key national government stakeholders	2	4	6	8	20
Key inter- and non-governmental stakeholders	9	3	2	(regional focus) 4	18
Total Interviews	41	27	32	32	132

#### 4.4 Participant Overview

Table 5 (below) provides more detailed descriptive statistics relating to the sample of refugee and other migrant participants.

Research participants are classified as “family” or “single” according to whether the individual was with their spouse and/or children and/or parents at the time of fieldwork. This means that individual migrants are considered “single” if they were travelling on their own, if they left their family members back in the country of origin or country of transit (for example in Turkey) or if they were travelling only with friends, siblings, cousins or other relatives.

As shown in Table 5, despite strong efforts by the research team, women were under-sampled and represent only 16 percent of respondents. Forty percent of respondents represent family units that were together at the time of interview. The sample was relatively young: 43 percent of respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, with steadily decreasing proportions represented in the older age groups. Of the 66 respondents interviewed outside of Turkey, 22 had left Turkey prior to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016 (23%), and 44 had left afterwards (46%).

#### 4.5 Limitations

The relatively small sample size for this research imposes limitations on the strength of conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis. It is therefore important to emphasize that the research is exploratory, and any conclusions should be interpreted cautiously and would need to be verified through further research before they could serve as the basis for policy decisions. A further limitation is that the research findings are based on retrospective accounts of respondents’ decision making and, in the case of responses to the vignette questions, on hypothetical decision making.

Further limitations have been introduced by the sampling methods. Response rates cannot be calculated but the research team was particularly aware that in the Netherlands potential participants were frequently distrustful of the research process and many declined to participate, or did not give full accounts of their decision making in the interview, because they feared that, if these research interviews were cross-checked with the accounts they had given in their asylum interviews, their asylum claims and rights to residence might be jeopardized. This was in spite of the interviewers’ best efforts to assure potential participants that the research was independent and that their confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured.

Furthermore, in Turkey, high proportions of the Syrian and Afghan refugee and other migrant populations reside in the community (rather than in camps), and some of those in transit through Turkey are accommodated in the houses of their smugglers for their brief periods of stay, and are therefore less visible and less easily contacted. Without purposive sampling, the recruitment strategy (largely via networks) would have likely resulted in over-sampling members of the target group who have established more settled lives in Turkey. Therefore, the research team in Turkey sampled purposively to ensure that the sample included research participants who had already attempted onwards movement, or who were aspiring to move onwards, as well as research participants who were more settled in Turkey. As the families initially interviewed seemed to be settled in Turkey and therefore did not relate well to the questions on decision making, the research team later included more single migrants (including single mothers) who had more information about - and sometimes, direct experience of - border crossings onwards from Turkey. This methodological choice should be taken into account in the interpretation of the data collected in Turkey.

Table 5. Overview of characteristics of refugee and other migrant interviewees

	Gender	Family and single	Age	Born in Iran/ living in Iran long-term before coming to Turkey	Left Turkey pre- or post-EU-Turkey Statement
<b>Syrians (n=49)</b>	Men: 41 (84%) Women: 8 (16%)	Family: 26 (53%) Single: 23 (47%)	18-25: 16 (33%) 26-35: 18 (37%) 36-45: 10 (20%) 46-55: 2 (4%) 56-65: 1 (2%) Unknown: 2 (4%)	N/A	Pre: 10 (20%) Post: 20 (41%) Still in Turkey: 19 (39%)
<b>Afghans (n=47)</b>	Men: 40 (85%) Women: 7 (15%)	Family: 14 (30%) Single: 33 (70%)	18-25: 27 (57%) 26-35: 11 (23%) 36-45: 7 (15%) 46-55: 1 (2%) Unknown: 1 (2%)	8 (17%)	Pre: 12 (26%) Post: 24 (51%) Still in Turkey: 11 (23%)
<b>Total (n=96)</b>	Men: 81 (84%) Women: 15 (16%)	Family: 40 (42%) Single: 55 (57%)	18-25: 43 (45%) 26-35: 29 (30%) 36-45: 17 (18%) 46-55: 3 (3%) 56-65: 1 (1%) Unknown: 3 (3%)	8 (8%)	Pre: 22 (23%) Post: 44 (46%) Still in Turkey: 30 (31%)



Equally, although the research team did make contact with potential research participants who were about to leave Turkey (and some indeed left before they could be interviewed) it is likely that Syrians and Afghans who were transiting through Turkey more quickly and without much contact outside of smuggler networks may be under-represented. As a result, the sample in this study cannot be considered representative of all refugees and migrants on the route between 2015 and 2018, but is broad enough to meet the exploratory aims of the research.

The research team in Turkey also had difficulties in accessing smugglers for interviews. Both in Istanbul and Gaziantep, the team indirectly communicated with smugglers via respondents' networks. However, none of these smugglers agreed to take part in the research. Before 2015 the smuggling activities were more visible than today and there were more smugglers available to interview. As border controls have become stricter, the visibility of smuggling activities in the public space has decreased as people are more reluctant to facilitate transportation and hotels are reluctant to accept guests without documentation.

It is recognized that smugglers tend to be better informed regarding policies and routes than refugees and migrants. Therefore, the lack of interviews with smugglers in Turkey represents a significant data gap within this study wherein it can be hypothesized that smugglers may have had more information on how the EU-Turkey Statement has influenced routes and decisions. Some research suggests that smugglers are the main source of information on irregular border crossings along the Balkan route (Yıldız, 2017; Mandić, 2017). Yıldız's International Organization for Migration (IOM)-sponsored research reveals that migrants choose the smugglers that

they most trust and then rely on the smuggler's decisions regarding the choice of timing and route (Yıldız, 2017). Smugglers' decisions, in turn, are defined by the policy context but also by market demand. Yıldız (2017) suggests that following the EU-Turkey Statement demand for the sea crossing to Greece has declined among refugees and migrants. Instead, smugglers offer the option to go directly to Italy in larger boats, at much higher prices. At the same time however, this report relies on direct accounts from refugees and migrants regarding their knowledge and decision making.

#### 4.6 Summary

The methodology for this study includes a literature review, construction of a timeline of events from 2015-2018, and original interviews with 38 key stakeholders and 96 Afghan and Syrian respondents across the four countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands, Serbia, Turkey. Although a fair number of interviews have been conducted, the sample of refugees and migrants included in the study is quite small in comparison to the population of these groups, particularly in Turkey. Selective sampling was therefore used in Turkey to gather a diversity of cases and responses and thus cannot be viewed as representative of the overall population in Turkey. Further large-scale survey research would be required to give a more accurate picture of overall migrant intentions in Turkey.



## 5. Afghans' and Syrians' Decision Making in Turkey and on the Western Balkans Route

Following from the model of refugee and migrant decision making (Figure 6 in Section 3), this section examines the decision making reported by the Afghan and Syrian respondents in this study. A central finding from the respondents was that 'active decisions' were made in Turkey regarding the decision to stay or move onwards, but not in Bosnia and Herzegovina nor Serbia. Respondents did not consider staying in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia as an option. Therefore, once the decision was made in Turkey, all countries along the Western Balkans route were 'transit' countries for the respondents. There are a few small exceptions to this statement, which will be explained further in the following sections. However, considering that active decision making is primarily made in Turkey, and that Turkey has seen the most significant structural changes due to the EU-Turkey Statement, this section places more emphasis on conditions in Turkey.

The first part of this section summarizes respondents' intended destination choices when leaving their country of origin. The following sections discuss respondents' experiences in the current country of stay (or transit), perceived conditions in the destination country, conditions in the origin country, individual factors, and social networks. The conclusion provides an overview of respondents' decision making processes.

### 5.1 Intended Destination when leaving Country of Origin

Table 6 provides an overview of respondents' intended destinations when they left their countries of origin. In the case of Afghan respondents who had already lived for more than ten years in Iran when they started their current migration to Turkey or through the Western Balkans route, the researchers consider Iran to be the country of origin for the purpose of the analysis presented below. It is well known that Afghans are currently leaving Iran due to increasing restrictions on movement, their inability to secure legal work and education opportunities, and increasing deportations from Iran to Afghanistan (Kuschminder, 2018a; Dimitriadis, 2018; Donini et al., 2016). A higher proportion of Syrian respondents (19 out of 49) stated that Turkey was their intended destination when

they left Syria, as compared to Afghans (6 out of 47). Afghan respondents more frequently reported that they intended to continue onwards to Europe (27 out of 47 respondents) or that they did not have firm plans regarding where they wanted to go (11 out of 47 respondents).

Among respondents whose initial intended destinations were Europe, the majority (65%) had a specific European destination country in mind (33 respondents, of which 17 were Afghan and 16 were Syrian). The remaining 35% had not decided on a particular country, or were considering two or more potential destinations (18 respondents, of which 11 were Afghan and 7 were Syrian).

For the 19 out of 49 Syrian respondents whose intended destination when starting their migration journey was Turkey, Turkey was the intended choice due to its position as a neighbouring country and relative accessibility, and a smaller number of respondents (who came to Turkey in 2014 and 2015) wanted to join family and friends already there. In contrast, a small number of respondents (2) who left Syria later (in 2016 and 2018 respectively) explained that, for them, Turkey was by then the only destination left. By that time, Turkey had closed and militarized the border with Syria, and Lebanon and Jordan had also closed their borders to refugees. Turkey was the only option offered by the smugglers in Syria, and thus by default became the intended destination.

### 5.2 Conditions in the Current Country: Turkey

This section focuses on how conditions in Turkey influenced decision making once respondents were in Turkey. The focus is on the wider conditions of life in Turkey, reflecting the decision making model, and policies in Turkey are specifically examined in Section 6.2 of this report. The first section below provides an overview of active decision making in Turkey to stay or move onwards. The second examines relevant decision making factors for those who have chosen to stay in Turkey and their reasons for this decision. The final section explores how conditions in Turkey influence the decision making of those seeking to move onwards from Turkey.

Table 6. Afghan and Syrian Respondents Intended Destination in Origin Country

#### Syrian Respondents

Field site	Turkey	Europe	Other	Undecided	Unclear	Total
Turkey	12	4	1 (Canada)	0	2	19
BiH	2	8	1 (U.S.)	1	0	12
Serbia	2	2	0	2	0	6
NL	3	8	0	1	0	10
Total	19	22	2	4	2	49

#### Afghan respondents

Field site	Turkey	Europe	Other	Undecided	Unclear	Total
Turkey	5	2	1 (Canada)	2	1	11
BiH	1	9	0	2	0	12
Serbia	0	12	0	2	0	14
NL	0	5	0	5	0	10
Total	6	28	1	11	1	47

### 5.2.1 Active Decision Making in Turkey

As illustrated above, only a minority of respondents in this study had intended to stay in Turkey when leaving their country of origin (25 of a total 96). Only eight of the 66 respondents interviewed outside of Turkey reported that they had originally intended to stay in Turkey rather than move onwards. Seven of these eight respondents were Syrian. This suggests that, as found by Kuschminder (2018b), decision making amongst refugees and migrants tends more often to stay constant than change in transit locations.

Similarly, of the ten respondents interviewed in Turkey who did not initially intend Turkey to be their destination, only two subsequently decided to stay in Turkey - both are Syrian and both changed their minds due to the risks and difficulties of the irregular onwards journey (and at least one of these respondents would migrate onwards if given the opportunity to do so legally). In contrast, of the 17 respondents interviewed in Turkey who did initially intend Turkey to be their destination, at the time of interview seven (three out of the five Afghans, but only four out of the 12 Syrians in this sub-group) had decided that they did not want to stay in Turkey and instead aspired to move onwards. This reflects the dynamic nature of decision making and its fluidity over time (Wissink et al., 2013).

None of the Syrian respondents interviewed in Turkey and who expressed current aspirations for onwards movement (10 in total) indicated that they were actively making concrete plans to leave Turkey (apart from seeking resettlement through UNHCR) - and six of them clarified that they were only considering "legal" routes (which could include the costly option of travelling with fraudulent documents), or were reluctant to take the irregular land or sea route, for onwards migration. These qualifications demonstrate how respondents' high aspirations for onwards migration were mediated by their perceptions of the risks involved in irregular movement, which were likely to deter them from realising their aspirations unless a legal migration opportunity arose. Only one Syrian respondent who originally intended to migrate to Europe had since decided to stay in Turkey.

Of the 11 Afghans interviewed in Turkey, nine were currently aspiring to migrate onwards. Of these, only one was actively making plans to leave with a smuggler at the time of interview. The remaining respondents had either exhausted, or so far failed to accumulate, the necessary funds to finance their onwards movement and although they aspired to leave Turkey, clearly had little capability to do so. One of these respondents had already tried to leave for Greece four times but had been unsuccessful in these attempts. This reflects Carling's notion of involuntary immobility: these respondents have a strong aspiration to migrate, but lack the capabilities to do so due to the interaction between the lack of legal opportunities, the high financial costs required for the irregular route, and the

border control practices which physically prevent them from leaving even if they manage to pay for a smuggler (Carling, 2002). This suggests that, whereas Syrians are more often deterred from onwards movement by the risks of the journey (which impact their aspirations), Afghans have high aspirations for onwards migration, but remain in Turkey due to their limited capabilities for onwards movement.

### 5.2.2 Reasons to Stay in Turkey

The ten Syrians who, at the time of interview, intended to stay in Turkey did so largely for reasons of geographical proximity to Syria, cultural familiarity and employment, as well as the deterrent risks of the onwards journey. First, it is worth emphasising that eight of the 19 Syrian respondents in Turkey said that they had initially intended to stay in Turkey because they hoped to return to Syria as soon as the conflict was over. Likely due to the increasingly protracted nature of the conflict, the prospect of return to Syria featured less strongly in respondents' discussions of their current intentions. The reasons that respondents gave for their current intentions to stay in Turkey focussed firstly on cultural familiarity. Three respondents, who all had their families and children with them in Turkey, were motivated to stay in Turkey because it was important to them to be in an Islamic country with a similar culture and traditions to those that they were used to in Syria - these respondents were concerned that Europe would be too culturally different. A second reason was employment. Three young Syrian men had found more highly-skilled work in Turkey (all three had either started or completed their higher education in Syria) and explained that they felt relatively settled and were content to stay in Turkey. Key stakeholders interviewed in Turkey also stated that refugees employed in the formal job market were more likely to stay. This also reflects findings from 2015 by Koser and Kuschminder (2016) that those who were employed in Turkey were significantly more likely to want to stay in Turkey. Finally, the risks and challenges of the irregular journey provided an important disincentive to onwards movement: in some cases this factor acted alongside the respondents' active preference for Turkey, but in a couple of other cases the respondents explained that, were it not for these risks, they would prefer to migrate onwards from Turkey.

Among the much smaller number of Afghans (6 out of 47) who initially intended to stay in Turkey, there was less discussion of why they had chosen Turkey as their destination. Similar reasons related to safety and religious and cultural proximity were stated. At the same time, these respondents were cautious regarding the risks of the irregular journey onwards. Additionally, one respondent explained simply that, in his view, it would not be worth moving onwards from Turkey because refugees in Europe face the same problems as in Turkey.



Key stakeholders interviewed in Turkey also reflected on the importance of language. They perceived that refugees that had learned to speak Turkish were more likely to want to stay in Turkey as they had better integration prospects.

On the whole, the reasons for choosing to stay in Turkey reported by respondents indicate that, whether or not they have the capabilities to move onwards, some respondents do not aspire to migrate onwards, actively choosing instead to stay in Turkey. This highlights the agency exercised by those who choose to stay, as distinct from those whose agency is undermined by their insufficient opportunities and capabilities to move onwards, leaving them stuck in a situation of 'involuntary immobility'.

### 5.2.3 Reasons to Leave Turkey

Respondents who had already left or wanted to leave Turkey described a complex range of factors motivating their onwards movement. These included: their lack of legal rights, lack of access to healthcare and education, poor economic prospects and living conditions, difficult working conditions and experiences of discrimination in Turkey. As widely discussed in the literature and later in Section 6.2, the current legal and institutional framework in Turkey does not provide legal opportunities for long term refugee and migrant settlement and integration paving the way for permanent residency and citizenship (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2016; Üstübici, 2018). Further, the majority of the refugees and migrants interviewed by the research team were not selected from the settled population but rather from among more recent arrivals who would consider themselves as in transit in Turkey. As discussed in the previous section, only a minority of the total sample (25 out of 96) had initially planned that Turkey would be their final destination. The legal and socio-economic situation they found themselves in Turkey contributed to their decision to move on.

This section highlights the decision making of those who left or aspire to leave Turkey in a comparative context of before and after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. It will be demonstrated that there are similarities in the reasons given by respondents who left after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement (or who wanted to leave at the time of fieldwork) and those who left prior to this agreement. The implications of this will be discussed further in the conclusion (Section 7).

#### Insecurity regarding the legal right to stay in Turkey

Both Afghan and Syrian respondents were frustrated by the insecurity they faced with regards to their legal right to remain in Turkey, but this was a more acute concern for Afghans who actively feared deportation. Many Afghan respondents (10 out of the total 47) discussed the lack of access to "documents" that would allow them to stay legally in Turkey as a reason for their decision to move onwards. Seven of these respondents actively feared deportation from Turkey (which increased in early 2018 when mass deportations began). Most of these seven respondents had left Turkey in 2018 or were still in Turkey at



the time of interview. One of these respondents had already been deported from Turkey to Afghanistan and had had to travel back to Turkey and then onwards to Europe, and others explained that the risk of arrest meant that they avoided going out in public, and were unable to imagine a future for themselves in Turkey. These narratives are in line with field observations: there are increasing security controls in areas populated by the Afghan migrant community, pushing newly arrived Afghans to remain as invisible as possible.

Although Syrian refugees have much greater access to legal rights in Turkey, the limitations of their temporary protection status, which gives no right to indefinite stay in Turkey, was mentioned as a reason for moving onwards from Turkey, both by respondents that left before and after the EU-Turkey Statement. Furthermore, whilst the legal rights associated with temporary protection status for Syrians in Turkey have not changed between 2015 and 2018, their de facto legal security has arguably deteriorated, as it has become harder for newer arrivals to access temporary protection status. This is evidenced by two Syrian respondents who came to Turkey in 2015 and 2016 respectively and wanted to stay, but who were refused registration for temporary protection in particular cities, and so left Turkey. One of these respondents, interviewed in the Netherlands (having left Turkey in 2017) explained that when he arrived in Izmir in June 2016:

*"I went to register myself as a refugee, but they didn't give me papers or anything. They only gave me an identification paper. I asked them to give me a kimlik but they didn't give me one. [...] I stayed there for one year and three months and they didn't give me anything. The only paper they gave me was an identification paper, just to prove my identity. [...] I rented a room with some people and I worked. Renting a room and working there was done illegally. Everything was done illegally because I have no official papers. But to live, one has to work."*



Similarly, a Syrian man interviewed in Turkey and who had arrived in Turkey in late 2018 stated that he had not been able to apply for temporary protection in Istanbul. This is the case because the DGMM no longer accepts registrations either for temporary protection or for asylum in Istanbul unless there is a legitimate family, work, or health related reason. Therefore, a considerable number of Afghans and Syrians in search of work nonetheless stay in Istanbul without proper registration (Üstübici, 2018). Without this status, they are deprived of basic services such as healthcare and education.

A smaller number of Syrians also discussed fears of deportation. This was a particularly important reason to move onwards from Turkey for Syrian respondents who had left Turkey more recently (in 2017 and 2018). For example, one young Syrian man interviewed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and who left Turkey in 2017 explained: “Imagine, I have escaped prison, escaped from the regime, escaped from arrest, I go to stay in Turkey so that [as soon as] Turkey makes a deal with the Assad regime it would send us back”. For another young Syrian man, interviewed in the Netherlands, fear of deportation was his primary motivation for leaving Turkey in 2018 - he had already tried to obtain Turkish citizenship in order to achieve legal security in Turkey but had been defrauded with a fake passport.

The fear of return and uncertainty regarding status is a common experience among Syrians across Europe today, and is not unique to the Turkish context as many countries, including the Netherlands, have increasingly shortened the duration of permits to stay. However, while in European countries there is still a path towards citizenship, for Syrians in Turkey, as illustrated in the example above and discussed further in Section 6, the path towards citizenship is neither transparent nor predictable and is viewed by refugees as fraught with uncertainty and doubt.

### **Socio-economic rights and opportunities**

Respondents frequently expressed frustration regarding their lack of access to regulated, legal work opportunities. As discussed in Section 2, this has been a point of contention following the EU-Turkey Statement; the EU has not seen the expected progress on socio-economic integration that the Facility for Refugees in Turkey was designed to support - namely due to disagreements with the Turkish authorities on how to proceed in this area (European Court of Auditors, 2018).

The lack of economic opportunities in Turkey was a key factor motivating onwards decision making, cited by seven Syrian respondents and 13 Afghan respondents. As further discussed in Section 6, the fact that barriers to the formal labour market still motivate onwards movement from Turkey indicates that the Turkish government’s policy of providing access to legal work permits to people under temporary protection in Turkey (introduced in 2016) has not, in practice, made it possible for the majority of Syrians to work with decent conditions in the formal labour market.

Respondents (who had already left Turkey both pre- and post-Statement, and also those who were still in Turkey) frequently discussed the problems they faced in the Turkish labour market and economy, which placed them in precarious situations and left some respondents exploited by their employers. Regardless of their educational or professional background, respondents were most often employed in low-skilled jobs in Turkey, which required them to work long shifts in difficult conditions and with no job security (12 hour days were commonly reported). Working in these informal conditions, respondents reported that they were paid much less than their Turkish colleagues and, according to respondents, Afghans tended to receive even less than Syrians due to their more precarious status that allowed their greater exploitation. Several respondents (5 Afghan; 2 Syrian) reported that employers in Turkey frequently do not pay what they owe their employees for their hours worked. These findings build on several earlier and more recent studies that have reported the prevalent challenges faced by refugees in the informal labour market (Bélanger & Saracoglu, 2018; European Commission, 2019b; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016; Toksöz, Erdoğan, & Kaşka, 2012).

It is thus unsurprising that with low and insecure salaries, and the high costs of living in Turkey - particularly since the 2018 currency crisis - similar proportions of Afghan and Syrian respondents who have been in Turkey after March 2016 reported that they struggled to make ends meet. As one young Syrian man interviewed in Turkey explained, life in Turkey “is tough, because salaries are low, rent is expensive, food is expensive, salaries don’t cover the expenses... For instance, I get 1400 liras; rent is 1100, so only 300 left”. Particularly young men from Afghanistan, who were sharing flats with other single male migrants, highlighted that, in addition to needing to support themselves, they were also under pressure to send money back to their families in Afghanistan. They explained that they found it extremely difficult - or were unable to do this - with what they earned in Turkey.

Child labour was another key concern highlighted by respondents. Two Syrian respondents explained that, in order to make ends meet in Turkey, they were obliged to send their children to work in Turkey, rather than let them continue their schooling. This was a key motivating factor to leave Turkey. These two respondents had both left Turkey in 2015 (therefore prior to the programming that aimed to promote the education of Syrian children in Turkey). However, a respondent living and interviewed in Turkey also stressed that he has had to consider taking his children out of school if the family’s situation deteriorates and they need the extra income.

Child labour is an area of concern that has been highlighted in the existing literature. Because of the requirements of work in sectors such as textiles, construction, and agriculture, young members of the family, including children, become the only ones able to find work and provide for their families (Korkmaz, 2018; Üstübici, 2018). Therefore, schooling opportunities, and

the desire to free children from economic obligations towards the family, becomes one of the main motivations for individuals and families with capabilities to leave Turkey to do so. Informal interviews in the Netherlands have stressed that Syrian refugee children are ecstatic to be in the Netherlands because they are able to go to school instead of performing intensive labour activities as they did in Turkey.

Respondents who were able to cover their basic expenses were frustrated that their long hours of hard work did not offer anything more than a means of survival - they were unable to put anything aside to live decently, or to invest in a business or house. The inability to make a decent living was discussed by four Afghan respondents and nine Syrian respondents, the majority of whom had come to Turkey after 2016. As one Afghan interviewed in Serbia commented:

*"In Turkey the [lack of] passport is not the only problem. You work there but that money is just enough to spend on daily food. Is it not possible to save anything and build a future there."*

Poor economic prospects and living conditions were discussed by respondents who had left prior to and after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. However, there were indications that the economic conditions faced by refugees and migrants in Turkey had deteriorated over time, rather than improving as the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey had been designed to support. For example, one young Syrian man (interviewed in Bosnia and Herzegovina) who left Turkey in 2018, having lived there for four or five years, explained:

*"I would have loved to stay in Turkey, but there were no livelihoods left in Turkey [...] you work as a slave to earn enough to cover your rent, and even with this they don't give you everything you have rightly earned."*

This respondent said that he had turned down an opportunity to move onwards in 2014 when it was known to be relatively easy because at that time he was "comfortable in Turkey", but later on when he was married and had to support a family, it became too difficult to stay. Similarly, another Syrian man also interviewed in transit with his family in Bosnia and Herzegovina said that he had lived in Turkey since 2014 but finally left at the beginning of 2018 because:

*"they dealt with us in a different way in the recent period. It started to be hard to live from what you earn, [there were] many expenses and one couldn't afford them. Work would start from 3-4 AM until 5 PM with a little salary, but we had to work like that to be able to live."*

These final quotes suggest that the structural factors discussed in Section 2 on the changing environment in Turkey, such as rising inflation and increased competition for jobs, are acutely felt by respondents and represent an important driver of onwards movement.

### Lack of access to health care and education

Syrians under temporary protection and (non-Syrian) registered asylum seekers have de jure access to free and public health care and public education for their school-age children in the province where they are registered. However, the lack of access to healthcare and other basic services were cited as motivations for wanting to leave Turkey by respondents with legal status who nonetheless experienced de facto barriers to service use, and by respondents without legal status in Turkey. The lack of access to affordable healthcare was mentioned by one Syrian and two Afghan respondents in Turkey at the time of interview, as well as by one Syrian respondent who left Turkey in 2017 and who suffers from a chronic health condition. One Afghan woman interviewed in Turkey explained that, even though she is registered as a refugee in Turkey and has the right to free healthcare, in practice she often faces barriers at the point of use – for example, she had recently been informed that her health insurance was no longer valid.

Respondents also expressed frustration with the barriers to accessing educational opportunities for themselves or for their children. This was either because they simply could not continue their higher education in Turkey or because they faced legal or administrative hurdles. For example, an Afghan man interviewed in Turkey explained that, even though he and his family have international protection status in Turkey, he has had to bribe local authorities in order to ensure that his oldest son can attend school. The quality of available education-provision was reported as a problem by two Syrian fathers (interviewed in the Netherlands) who left Turkey in 2015 and 2018, respectively.

### Experiences of xenophobia and fears for safety

Both Syrians and Afghans discussed the social problems they faced in Turkey, which ranged from concerns that they would never be accepted as equal members of society in Turkey, exploitative and discriminatory practices and the threat of violence. Two Syrian respondents who were Kurdish and Christian, respectively, explained that they felt particularly vulnerable in Turkish society, due to their different religious or ethnic affiliations (both left Turkey in 2018, and were interviewed in transit through the Western Balkans).

Although Turkey was perceived as a safe country by some respondents (at least in terms of their physical security), several interviewees (two Syrian respondents and five Afghan respondents among the total sample) expressed concerns that they were at risk of harassment, violence and even kidnapping for ransom. It was unclear to what extent these fears of violent criminality were based on rumour and perception, or concrete incidents (indeed this was a point of disagreement amongst a group of Syrian women interviewed together whilst in transit through the Western Balkans). One Afghan and two Syrian respondents reported that their siblings or other relatives had been victims of kidnappings or violent threats by mafia groups in Turkey. One Afghan

respondent interviewed in the Netherlands and who left Turkey in 2016 further elaborated on the fear and violence he experienced in Turkey:

*“when I arrived in Turkey I saw the violence, I faced the fight of Kurdish people. They behave so bad with Afghan people they beat them, they break their head and they are not human. They keep them for ransom, they are lying that they are the smuggler they ask you to call your family to send money. If you don't ask for the money they kill you. In that situation you have to do it. There are lots of miserable things has happened there, my body is burned”.*

Two respondents (one Syrian and one Afghan) who had already left Turkey (they were interviewed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Netherlands, respectively) explained their decision to move onwards as motivated primarily by the fear of being persecuted in Turkey by the same actors they had escaped in leaving their countries of origin. The young Afghan respondent explained that: “I would not stay [in Turkey]. It is not a safe country. The person with whom you had a problem in Afghanistan can easily target you in Turkey”. It is evident that for some respondents fears for their safety were high in Turkey and this was a key factor motivating their onwards movement.



### 5.3 Conditions in Other Countries of Transit

Conditions in other countries of transit had a lesser impact on respondents' decision making to stay in that country or move onwards. Once the decision to continue onto the EU had been made, respondents' decision making en route focused primarily on the choice of route, means of transport and preferred destination country (if they did not have a fixed idea of which EU country they wanted to settle in). As the following section describes, respondents engaged in little active decision making as to whether to stay in countries of transit between Turkey and their preferred EU destinations. This is primarily because respondents did not consider that countries such as Greece, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina offered adequate opportunities to find economic security and re-build their lives.

Greece, as an EU country, was the country of transit given some consideration as a potential destination country by a small number of respondents. Two Syrian respondents and two Afghan respondents (who arrived there in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively) said that they would have stayed in Greece if they could have made decent lives for themselves and their families there. One Syrian man interviewed in transit with his family in Bosnia and Herzegovina explained that when they arrived on the Greek mainland in 2018:

*“they took us to a place that doesn't offer the means of living: no schools, no markets. They used to take us to Grevena in buses every Monday and Friday to buy our groceries. We left Syria for our kids to study and for me to work, but we didn't find that at all in Greece”*

In other words, in terms of legal and socio-economic conditions, the respondent considered the situation in Greece as similar to Turkey. It is worth noting that Koser and Kuschminder (2016) found in 2015 that a significantly higher number of respondents wanted to move onwards from Greece than Turkey. One hypothesis to explain this was that, once refugees and migrants had made the decision to leave Turkey, Greece was not conceived of as the destination, and was therefore only a site of 'transit', as found by Dimitriadi (2015).

The majority of respondents interviewed in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were not open to the possibility of staying in either respective country. The main reasons respondents reported for not wanting to stay in Serbia were: i) Serbia's less developed asylum system relative to those of key EU countries (in terms of processing times, prospects for recognition, and support offered to status-holders); and ii) poor economic prospects in Serbia. A Syrian father who had been stranded with his family for over a year in Serbia explained: “Here in Serbia there are no jobs. There's unemployment in all Serbia and even Serbians can't find jobs”.

Similar reasons were expressed by respondents asked to reflect on whether they had considered or might consider staying in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respondents generally rejected the



idea of staying in Bosnia and Herzegovina because they perceived life as very difficult there and they were aware that many nationals from that country leave as economic migrants to the EU. One Afghan man interviewed in Bosnia and Herzegovina explained: “I know the life here, I go to the Mosque here almost every day for the morning prayer and also for the Friday prayers, I talk to the people who live here, here is not the place that I want to live”.

These perceptions were also reinforced by the key stakeholders interviewed in the Western Balkans, all of whom emphasized that refugees and migrants would not consider staying in Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the view of the key stakeholders interviewed, the reasons why refugees and migrants do not stay in these countries has less to do with the maturity of the asylum systems in these countries, and more to do with the overall economic situation. Like the refugee and migrant informants, these key stakeholders often pointed to the fact that, if there are high rates of out-migration among the domestic populations in these countries, it does not seem reasonable to expect that refugees and migrants would want to stay in either country. As one government official in Serbia explained:

*“The problem is that the average salary in this country is small, that social protection measures are extremely low. That here, even if the law permitted him [the asylum seeker] to work, when he obtains some type of status, and even if he was lucky to get a job, he can earn 200 EUR, and with 200 EUR you cannot live. And he knows that the social welfare allowance only 150 kilometres away from us is 800 EUR, and that he will be provided with an apartment, food and furniture, and none of them - again I say unfortunately - do not even consider integration here.”*

Finally, there was some evidence that continued failed attempts to move onwards from Serbia led some refugees and migrants stranded in Serbia to choose to stay there. Two interviewees had applied for asylum in Serbia having failed several times to move onwards (8 and 9 times, respectively). One was a young Afghan man who had been persuaded to stay in Serbia by his network of friends in Serbia. Based on their advice, he decided to stay because his advanced language skills would be valued in the local labour market and would allow him to earn a good living in Serbia and make a stable life for himself there. A second respondent, a young Syrian man, had been in Serbia for over a year and a half, and had crossed legally into Hungary via the list system but had been rejected by the Hungarian authorities (apparently on the basis that it would be safe for him to return to Damascus). Having tried to move onwards from Serbia irregularly nine times, this respondent had given up further attempts and had instead applied for asylum in Serbia.

This section illustrates that decision making after Turkey is more passive in nature. There was wide consensus amongst respondents and key stakeholders that refugees and migrants do not consider the Western Balkan countries as countries in which to settle.

## 5.4 Perceived Conditions in the Destination Country

Conditions in Turkey were implicitly or explicitly compared by respondents to their perceptions of what life in Europe (or, in a couple of cases, other main Western asylum destinations such as Canada and Australia) would offer them. This section provides an overview of the reasons why respondents were motivated to travel onwards to their preferred destinations - but, as discussed in section 5.7 on social relations and networks, often respondents' reasons for undertaking the Western Balkans route was determined largely by their desire to join family members in European (or other Western) destination countries.

Key perceptions influencing onwards migration movement were: the opportunities for legal residence or citizenship available to refugees in Europe; the support available to refugees, for example in terms of social security and healthcare; and better economic prospects. There were also five young, single men in the total sample (four of whom were Afghan) who had started a university degree in their country of origin (or who had just finished high school and were about to), for whom the opportunities to pursue their education in Europe was a determining motivation for their journeys onwards.

Perceptions of what European societies offer in terms of political and civil liberties and a culture of tolerance and respect were also highly important to a number of respondents (the majority of whom were from Syria, and who represented a range of educational backgrounds). As one Syrian man (interviewed in Serbia) explained, drawing a link between Europe's social and political environment and educational opportunities:

*“in general, no Syrian would stay at home to take social benefits, we are not really looking for these things. My children come first place for me and I'm ready to work day and night to let them study and make their wrong beliefs go away. These wrong beliefs that we were raised to believe. Unfortunately, we lived in a country that has a government that plants hatred between people, so I don't want my children to live in the same situation. My children are the most important thing in life, so I'm ready to face risks for them, I have no problem doing that for them.”*

Perceptions of the destination country and the decision for migration is based on relative deprivation (Bakewell, Engbersen, Fonseca, & Horst, 2016) and the trade-off between the current country and the intended destination. This was strongly reflected in the accounts given by respondents who explained that they were not willing to accept life in Turkey if it only satisfied their basic needs, without offering them any hope of a better future for themselves or their children. Both Afghans and Syrians compared the lack of access to good educational opportunities, for either their own personal and career development (in the case of young, single respondents) or for their children (in the case of respondents travelling with young children) to the possibilities of what life would be like in Europe.



A Syrian man interviewed in the Netherlands explained that his initial intention when leaving Syria was to settle in Turkey and replicate the factory business he had successfully run in Syria. However, when he arrived in Turkey and tried to make a life there for his family, he found that his financial resources had been depleted by the costs of this first migration, to the extent that he was no longer able to launch his business. He explained that he then travelled onwards from Turkey in September 2015 with his oldest son in order to ensure that at least his children's opportunities would not suffer from their displacement:

*"It was either that I let [my children] work or let them study and they were studying since they were in Syria, so it would be hard to ask them to work for people. [...] My children are studying here [in the Netherlands] since [they came through] reunification and one of them has an MBO now. So, I didn't want them to lose their future and, if I stayed in Turkey, I would have found work but all of us would have needed to work there in order to be able to have a decent life, so they wouldn't [be able to] study. So I continued to Europe for my children's future and not my future."*

This idea of there being "no future" in Turkey was commonly discussed by both Syrian and Afghan respondents (from a range of educational and economic backgrounds), who wanted to secure a more dignified and meaningful existence for themselves (and particularly for their children, if they had families) rather than a life of precarious day-to-day survival. The perceptions of a better life in European destination countries thus included increased access to rights and freedoms, educational opportunities, and the possibility of a better quality of life.

### 5.5 Conditions in the Country of Origin

The prospect of return was discussed most frequently with Syrian respondents in Turkey, where return is a more immediate possibility, given geographical proximity and current policy developments and debates in Turkey. Return was rarely spontaneously discussed by respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, or the Netherlands. Due to the sensitivities regarding return and because this was not the core objective of this research, the interviewer did not probe further on this topic with the majority of respondents outside of Turkey. It was clear that for respondents further along the route to Europe or in the Netherlands, return was not viewed as an immediate option, even in the case of Afghan respondents in the Netherlands whose asylum claims had been rejected more than once. Key stakeholders with oversight of assisted voluntary return from the Western Balkans also emphasized that while Syrian refugees and migrants cannot be assisted to return to Syria due to safety concerns, very few Afghan refugees and migrants are willing to consider return, relative to other nationality groups where uptake of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) tends to be slightly higher.

Syrian respondents were more likely than Afghan respondents to want to return to their countries of origin. Five of the

nineteen Syrian respondents interviewed in Turkey said that they would like to return to Syria if conditions allowed them to return. Motivations for returning to Syria included nostalgia and ties to their homeland and their sense of belonging, as well as dissatisfaction with life in Turkey. In contrast, the majority of Afghan interviewees who discussed the prospect of return ruled it out as a possibility. Eight Afghan respondents said that they had no intentions to return to Afghanistan, while only two respondents expressed a strong desire to return to Afghanistan in the future, and a further three said that they might consider returning to Afghanistan if conditions there improved substantially.

Respondents discussed a range of reasons why return was not an option for them - either in the short to medium-term or indefinitely. This included: threats to their physical security, general instability, fears of forced conscription, and violence (including domestic violence) and persecution. Considering the country of origin of the respondents, this is unsurprising, and in line with other research findings (Donini, Monsutti, & Scalettari, 2016; Koser & Kuschminder, 2015; Kuschminder & Siegel, 2016)

### 5.6 Individual Factors

There are a number of individual attributes that can influence onwards decision making including: gender, socio-economic background, financial resources, physical capabilities and sensitivity to risk (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014). Due to the relatively small sample in this study and lack of variation in age and gender, this section focuses primarily on education, country of origin, financial resources, and other capabilities for onwards migration.

The Syrian respondents had more often completed higher education qualifications and had frequently enjoyed a better quality of life in Syria (prior to the conflict) than Afghans had in either Afghanistan or Iran. This reflects national data on education levels in Syria and Afghanistan (World Bank, 2019) and is likely a factor which contributes to the higher aspirations more frequently expressed by Syrian respondents relative to Afghan respondents. A few highly-skilled Syrian respondents (4) were motivated to leave Turkey because they perceived that they would always be regarded as second-class citizens there, and never accepted as equal members of Turkish society. Other Syrian respondents were frustrated that they were unable to find employment at their skill level in Turkey. Related fieldwork in Turkey has found that, although respondents from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have greater aspirations for moving onwards, they are also very aware of the risks involved in irregular border crossings and they receive more feedback about conditions on the route, as well as on the living conditions in countries of destination (forthcoming report for the Integration and Well-Being of Syrian Youth research project). Higher aspirations may not necessarily translate into actual movement for this group, as these individuals may be reluctant to attempt the irregular journey

and may instead seek opportunities for legal migration - for example, through higher education study and visa opportunities.

The financial resources that respondents had available to them seemed to be one of the most important determinants of respondents' intended and actual movements onwards (van Hear, 2006). As mentioned earlier in this section and further discussed in Section 6, many respondents stayed longer in Turkey and other countries of transit, or were still in those countries at the time of interview, because they did not have the necessary resources to fund their onwards movements, or had exhausted their funds on previous attempts. In many cases respondents tried to earn and save up the required resources in the country of transit; others had waited, or were waiting, to receive money sent by family members (either in the country of origin or, in some cases, in the country of destination).

The costs of moving onwards from Turkey have changed pre-and post-implementation of the EU-Turkey statement. The cost of the Turkey-Greece crossing was fairly standardized in 2015: the average price quoted by the seven respondents who remembered what the price had been in 2015 was 930 USD, and there was relatively little variation around this price mark. In contrast, the average price quoted by the six respondents who mentioned what they had paid in 2018 or 2019 was 4300 USD. The prices quoted for 2018/2019 also varied significantly - from between 800 EUR to 10,000 EUR. This reflects the ways in which the smuggling market has gone underground, and has become more diversified and more "customized" as the previously standard service of facilitating the crossing to the Aegean islands on a rubber dinghy has become much riskier (both for the smuggler and travellers).

Financial resources were also a determinant of where one respondent ended his migration journey in Europe. One Syrian respondent interviewed in the Netherlands explained:

*"I wanted to continue to Norway after I crossed to the Netherlands. But frankly I don't like cold weather and Norway has extreme cold weather. [...] There's also another reason I didn't continue after I reached the Netherlands, I didn't have money left, only 40 euros and I didn't want to borrow money, so that was it and I decided to stay here."*

Finally, respondents' different capabilities for onwards migration were not only influenced by their economic resources, but also by their physical capabilities. As further described below, within family units husbands and older sons were more likely to attempt, or successfully complete, irregular crossings, whilst women, young children, and elderly relatives were often left behind. Other respondents explained how their health conditions, or those of their family members with whom they were travelling, reduced their capabilities for irregular movement, either disincentivising (or indefinitely deferring) their onwards movement, or limiting their options as to which route or mode of transport to take.

Onwards movement is therefore the outcome of complex interactions between aspirations and capabilities. Although socio-economic background and education level may influence higher aspirations for onwards movement, the greater informational resources typically associated with higher education may reduce aspirations for irregular journeys, whilst the greater financial resources associated with higher socio-economic status may increase capabilities for (particularly irregular) movement. At the same time, low financial resources may not reduce aspirations for onwards movement, while there was some evidence that low physical capabilities may undermine aspirations for onwards movement: this was described by a young woman who was both pregnant and suffering from cancer when she left Turkey, and who was therefore much more reluctant than her family members to continue their journey past Greece.

## 5.7 Social Relations/Networks

Family reunification was a central decision making factor reflected by respondents. The risks and difficulties of an irregular journey often leads to the disbursement of family units, whereby the husband (and/or older sons) undertakes the journey with the aim of bringing across their family members through safer or legal routes later. Successfully bringing their family members over to join them can then become a key priority which determines respondents' decision making. Nine of the 79 respondents who had chosen, or who aspired, to settle in the EU explained that their choice of preferred EU destination country was motivated by their aim of bringing their families to join them: they wanted to go where they believed their prospects for family reunification would be highest.

The desire for family reunification can also determine the decision to stay in or move onwards from a potential destination country, in both directions. For example, as a result of the increased administrative and physical controls on entry to Turkey from Syria (see Sections 2.3 and 6.2.3), families were separated as men made the dangerous crossing and women and children stayed behind in Syria. Four Syrian respondents explained that the barriers to then bringing their families across safely to join them in Turkey became a critical factor in their decisions to move onwards (they all left Turkey in 2017). Because they did not have the right to family reunification in Turkey, these respondents considered that the only safe way for their families to leave Syria and join them outside was with a visa for family reunification in another country, thereby motivating their onwards movement to the EU. In contrast, another four young Syrian men interviewed in Turkey explained that the need to bring their families over from Syria disincentivized them from onwards movement because they did not want to migrate further than Turkey while their families were still in Syria.

The (increasing) barriers to accessing family reunification in EU countries (particularly in Germany) also contribute to explaining the continuation of irregular flows through the



Western Balkans even after the official closure of the route. Four young Syrian women explained that they had found themselves compelled to undertake the irregular route through the Western Balkans because their husbands and fiancés had migrated to Germany earlier on and had obtained protection status there. These respondents had not been able to access family reunification to join their partners in Germany and had eventually given up waiting, deciding instead to attempt the irregular journey on their own. Similarly, a young Afghan man explained that he was left alone in Afghanistan when his parents and younger siblings were offered asylum in Europe. Since the respondent was older than 17 years old he was unable to join his family in their country of destination through a legal channel, and therefore undertook the irregular journey.

As these cases suggest, the idea that refugee and migrant flows can be halted by physical and administrative border controls fails to recognize that family units will not easily be convinced to wait indefinitely for, or to give up on, their shared life and future as a family. This is particularly relevant in the context of the changing dynamics of the flows between 2015 and the present. As three IGO and INGO representatives working in the Western Balkans explained, as a result of the increased risks and difficulties on the route when border controls were strengthened, fewer families were travelling together and a higher proportion of men made the journey alone. However, in the longer term, the continued absence of safe, regular channels (including the increased restrictions on family reunification) will mean that those family members left behind will undertake the irregular journey if they can, in spite of the heightened protection risks that are supposed to deter their movement.

## 5.8 Summary

This section has aimed to explore how different decision making factors of the model presented in Section 3 influenced respondents' decisions to stay in Turkey or move onwards.

There are several key points to highlight:

- Active decisions are made in Turkey to move onwards or stay in Turkey. These decisions are rarely made or reconsidered in the Western Balkan countries, as respondents do not view these countries as potential destinations. Recognizing again that the sample in Turkey contains selection bias, it is nonetheless noteworthy that, of the respondents interviewed in Turkey that had originally planned to migrate to Turkey and no further, around 40 percent now wanted to move onwards.
- With regard to the respondents who explained that they wanted to stay in Turkey, the reasons given primarily reflected an 'active' choice to stay, rather than a situation of 'involuntary immobility' or acceptance of being 'stuck in transit'. The main reasons cited for choosing to stay were: geographic proximity to Syria, cultural reasons, and the ability to find secure employment. The importance of formal employment that matched respondents' skills was emphasized by key stakeholders as a key factor influencing decisions to stay.
- In contrast, the main reasons cited for wanting to move onwards from Turkey were insecure legal status, lack of formal employment opportunities, poor living conditions, lack of health care and education access, and fears for personal safety in Turkey.
- The model of in transit decision making factors used in this section illustrates the multiple layers of factors which influence decision making. Similar to other studies, the analysis shows that conditions in the current country have particular weight in determining decision making. Other factors that play a significant role in decision making were family reunification, perceptions of a better life in Europe, and the recognition of a low possibility of return to countries of origin.
- This section has examined decision making processes primarily in terms of the factors that motivate the choice to stay in or move onwards from Turkey. However, as already indicated in this section, and as discussed further in the following section on the specific role of policies, the decision to leave or stay (the migration aspiration) does not necessarily translate into actual movement, due to the gap between capabilities and aspirations that some respondents experience.
- Finally, the empirical findings presented in this section illustrate that aspirations for onwards migration from Turkey have been motivated by similar reasons before and after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. This reflects the findings regarding the changing environment in Turkey overviewed in Section 2. The role of specific policies in influencing decision making in Turkey will be further discussed in the next section (Section 6).

## 6. The Interaction of Policies and Decision Making

This section builds on the previous by examining specifically the role of policies in respondents' decision making. It is important to stress that, as detailed in the previous section, decision making is a complex and multi-faceted process that is influenced by several factors, most notably conditions in the current country of stay, familial networks and separation, and knowledge and perceptions of better opportunities in Europe. Thus, although the specific role of policies is examined here, it does not mean that these are the most influential elements in the decision making process. Policies may play a role, as will be illustrated, but the importance of these policies should not be over-estimated.

In this section, we focus on migration-specific policies. Returning to the typology of policies detailed in Table 2 (Section 3), both migration-specific and migration-relevant policies can be influential in decision making. However, due to the significant increase in the number of migration-specific policies in Turkey (see Table 3 in Section 3) and along the Western Balkans route from 2015-2018, this section is limited to these migration-specific policies.

This section first examines respondents' knowledge, perceptions of and decision making regarding the policies of the EU-Turkey Statement. Second, decision making is explored in relation to policies implemented by the Turkish government with a focus on employment, citizenship, and securitization. In some places these first two sections are overlapping, so this division is recognized as somewhat imperfect. Finally, this section discusses the role of external migration control and deterrence policies in decision making along the Western Balkans route to Europe.

### 6.1 Knowledge, Perceptions and Decision Making Related to the EU-Turkey Statement

Respondents demonstrated large variation in terms of knowledge and perceptions of the EU-Turkey Statement. Of the 38 respondents who had left Turkey after March 2016 or who were still in Turkey at the time of interview, and who were asked directly whether they knew about the EU-Turkey Deal (not all were asked this question), 14 said that they knew about the deal (19%). 11 of these 14 respondents demonstrated knowledge of the deal that tended to be partial and either factual or semi-factual (compared to the Statement's stated intentions). Seven respondents (of whom five were Syrian and two were Afghan) said that they knew of the policy to return migrants to Turkey from Greece, although it was sometimes unclear whether they were referring to formal returns under the one-for-one arrangement, or to push-backs by Greek and Turkish border guards when refugees and migrants were intercepted mid-crossing. Five of these seven respondents explained their understanding of the returns policy quite differently than how it is set out in policy documents (all of these respondents had already left Turkey). These respondents'

perceptions included: Syrians are not returned because there is more leniency for them; that no-one is returned because the deal is just "propaganda"; that anyone who manages to enter Greek territory is not returned (i.e. if they are not intercepted on the crossing or border); and, conversely, that returns are enforced but to Syria rather than to Turkey. These various perceptions and knowledge of the EU-Turkey Statement are illustrations of how policies can be interpreted very differently by the population they target - or, conversely, that they reflect the imperfect implementation of these policies. Either way, and as confirmed by key stakeholders, the refugee and migrant respondents were not well informed about the specific external control policies introduced by the EU-Turkey Statement. Ensuring accurate information by refugees and migrants is a challenging process due to rumours, distrust of policy officials and NGOs and misperceptions circulated within networks.

A few respondents in Turkey stated that the EU-Turkey Statement had made onwards migration more difficult. A highly-educated Syrian respondent interviewed in Turkey explained that he would only take a legal pathway onwards from Turkey and had furthermore convinced his brother in law not to attempt the irregular journey because: "we knew that it was not safe and risky as EU signed an agreement with Turkey to prevent refugees from going to Europe illegally". Two other respondents in Turkey at the time of fieldwork commented that the Deal had effectively made the onwards journey much more difficult and was therefore successful in containing refugees and migrants, but that it had not removed the incentive to leave and people were still trying. For example, one Syrian respondent explained:

*"after holding the refugees [in Turkey], fewer people are going. But if the borders were opened, no Syrians would be left here."*

Similarly, the Afghan respondent, who was relatively well-informed about the EU-Turkey Statement, explained that, following the Deal:

*"everyone knows that now it is much more difficult and it is not possible to go onward [...] they know, but still people are going. Because the life in Turkey is difficult they just leave, they were telling me that they are not able to pay the rent and the daily expenses which is around 2000 Lira. They try to go through the sea or the land border. They put their life at risk and they go they don't want to stay here."*

A small number of respondents revealed the core perception that since the EU-Turkey Statement it was much more difficult to leave Turkey as the borders had been closed. Only two respondents (both Syrian nationals) interviewed in Turkey said that, following the border closures introduced by the EU-Turkey Statement, they had decided not to attempt the onwards





journey irregularly (but both still aspired to legal onwards movement). As for the 44 research participants (26 Syrians, 18 Afghans) interviewed outside Turkey and who had left Turkey after March 2016, none of these respondents had been effectively dissuaded from moving onwards from Turkey, regardless of their knowledge of the EU-Turkey Statement. This was also emphasised by several key stakeholder interviewees who, as further discussed in section 6.3, insisted that refugees and migrants do not give up on their migration aspirations. As one INGO representative explained:

*“[the EU-Turkey Statement] didn’t stop really people to cross, one way or another, because those people...they’re investing a lot of money, basically all the savings of their lives, and they would not like to be stopped in a country where they don’t see hope.”*

Five respondents interviewed in Turkey (three Syrians and two Afghans) were aware that as part of Turkey’s Deal with the EU, Turkey was receiving money from the EU for refugees. In terms of the actual impact of the specific components of the EU Facility for Refugees, there were three Syrian respondents interviewed in Turkey who reported that they were benefiting from the Kizilay Card issued by the Turkish Red Crescent as part of the ESSN cash transfer programme. These respondents described it as a much needed source of support but not as a determining factor in their decision to leave or stay. One Syrian and two Afghan respondents reported that they were in urgent need of the Kizilay cash aid, but had been denied access to it. However, each of these respondents explained that receiving this cash aid would not be enough, on its own, to make them want to stay in Turkey, because they had other important motivations to leave Turkey, and because, as one Syrian family explained, they did not want to be dependent on aid: “we don’t [want to] beg for anything from anyone”. Similarly, of the other seven respondents (5 Afghans and 2 Syrians) who were asked whether receiving cash aid in Turkey would, or would have, affected their decisions as to whether or not to stay in Turkey, none of them said that receiving this cash aid would have motivated them to stay. This was because they had strong motivations to leave Turkey which would not be changed in any way by cash assistance, they rejected the idea of dependency on aid, or, as one Afghan woman interviewed in Turkey explained

- a monthly transfer of 120 TL per month per family member would not mean that much to her because “I pay around 300 TL per month only for gas and electricity”.

A lawyer working in an NGO in Turkey similarly expressed that cash aid is not enough on its own to provide refugees with viable futures in Turkey:

*“Financial support has been increased for Turkey so that refugees could stay. However, they just save the day. Actually, these policies are assumed to save the day but in the long run they have ruined so many things...You make people dependent on aid. You need more long-term projects. At first, they were delivering food packages... Now there are Kizilay cards. In my opinion, aid is not right. It should be only for very short-term periods. You should think of durable solutions... The idea that giving 120 TL per person in order for refugees to stay in Turkey is neither acceptable nor can be considered within the scope of responsibility sharing.”*

As the lawyer stressed, both the low amount of money transferred to refugees under ESSN, and the limited access to ESSN cards (especially among non-Syrian refugees) make this cash aid a short-term solution only. Another key stakeholder (working in an NGO in Turkey) confirmed that the Facility has had very little impact on the lives of Afghans in Turkey because Afghans are largely excluded from access to the ESSN. As a result, the ESSN cards cannot be effective in reducing the incentives for onwards migration from Turkey, even though they are very important in supporting refugees’ day-to-day survival in Turkey (although only, of course, for those who have been granted access to this support)

Regarding the other key areas targeted by EU Facility programming, education and health, as discussed in Section 5 there were a number of respondents who were motivated to leave Turkey because of their lack of access to educational and health services in Turkey. This was either because they did not have legal rights to these services, or because they faced barriers accessing their rights in practice. Most of these respondents were Afghan, who are not the primary target for Facility funding.

## 6.2 Policies Implemented by the Turkish Government

In this section three sets of policies implemented by the Turkish government are discussed further: 1) employment permits and socio-economic opportunities for refugees; 2) citizenship for refugees; and 3) the securitization of Turkey's external borders and increasing internal control policies in Turkey.

### 6.2.1 Employment and Socio-Economic Opportunities

As stated in Section 2 of this report, the aim of promoting the socio-economic integration of refugees through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey has not progressed as planned. The European Court of Auditors reported in 2018 that progress against this objective has been slow due to disagreements between the EU and the Turkish government regarding programming in this area (European Court of Auditors, 2018). Regarding the Turkish government's own policies in this area, there was little evidence from the interview data that respondents had been positively impacted by the Turkish government's decision to open up access to legal work permits and to Turkish citizenship for Syrians under temporary protection and to non-Syrians with other international protection status.

Respondents in Turkey expressed scepticism regarding their prospects of obtaining, or even the value of obtaining, a legal work permit in Turkey. Two Syrians interviewed in Turkey explained that, because they had no intention of settling in Turkey (one wished to return to Syria rather), a legal work permit was irrelevant. Only two respondents in Turkey said that they had obtained a work permit - one of whom had to apply five times before successfully receiving it, and the other respondent's permit had expired when he moved to freelance work. Another Syrian respondent in Turkey said that he had been to see local city officials many times to try and obtain citizenship but had been so far unsuccessful.

Other respondents dismissed their own chances of getting a work permit due to the nature of their work and/or the obstacles faced regarding bureaucracy, employers and costs. Reflecting the findings presented in section 2, two Syrian respondents interviewed in Turkey explained that employers are reluctant to obtain work permits for their employees because of the higher costs associated with paying insurance. A Syrian man interviewed in Serbia, who had spent two and a half years in Turkey before leaving in 2017, elaborated his understanding of the barriers to accessing a work permit:

*"[...] it would cost a lot to issue such a permit. In Turkey you also need to have a powerful friend who could issue that permit for you and pay them because they will pay on your behalf like taxes and ...etc. Right now Syrians are working for around 1500 Turkish Lira per month. But if they officially registered you, they would need to pay you 3000 TL and pay taxes on your behalf, and of course they don't want that in Turkey. It's possible if you have a private business to issue a work permit and pay taxes, but as an employee this would be hard."*

The general perception among refugees and migrants is that access to work permits is exclusionary and limited to those with particular skills and economic capital. Indeed, the low number of Syrians who have received work permits confirms these perceptions. An NGO worker in Turkey further noted that the introduction of de jure access to legal work permits for non-Syrians with international protection status has, in practice, had little to no impact for the Afghan population in Turkey, and has therefore had no bearing on Afghans' migration decision-making.

The vignette question regarding employment asked: Please imagine that [you are still in Turkey and] you are given a legal work permit in Turkey that allows you to access formal employment with associated benefits such as sick pay, healthcare and pension contributions. Of the eight Syrian respondents who answered this question (as discussed in Section 4 not all respondents were asked all vignette questions), five said that even with a legal work permit they would not want to stay in Turkey. The other three indicated that access to a legal work permit would incline them towards staying in Turkey, but two of these respondents emphasized that the active choice to stay in Turkey would still depend on whether they could actually obtain employment that they considered 'decent' and satisfying. For example, one of these respondents (interviewed in the Netherlands) explained that a critical factor in his decision to leave Turkey in 2015 was that he was unable to find work that matched his skills and qualifications. Therefore, even in the case of Syrian refugees who are more inclined to want to stay in Turkey, expanding their de facto access to legal work permits is only likely to be an effective incentive to stay in Turkey if there are also adequate opportunities for dignified and meaningful work.

Three of the Afghan respondents who were asked this vignette question said that they would not be incentivised to stay in Turkey by the offer of a legal work permit. These respondents insisted that even the guarantee of legal employment paying 2000 TL a month would not change their minds. For example, one of these respondents explained that 2000 TL a month would still not be enough for him to cover his expenses in Turkey and support his family, which, as the eldest son, he needed to do. On the other hand, two other Afghan respondents said that they would stay in Turkey if given access to formal employment with the associated benefits (such as sick pay, healthcare and pension contributions) - but, like the Syrians discussed above, one of these respondents further qualified that they would still need a job with a salary that allows them to live decently.

### 6.2.2 Citizenship Possibilities in Turkey

Regarding the prospect of obtaining citizenship in Turkey, there was little awareness of this policy option among respondents who had already left Turkey and were interviewed in the other field sites. By contrast, in Turkey Syrian respondents were often aware of the policy of granting citizenship to refugees, and

often knew people who had obtained citizenship or had applied for it themselves. Five of the 19 Syrian respondents interviewed in Turkey said that they had applied for, or had been nominated or were hoping to be nominated for, Turkish citizenship - although two of these respondents did not actually want to stay in Turkey. For those respondents who were hoping to acquire citizenship and stay in Turkey, citizenship was viewed as a very important asset in terms of offering greater freedoms (particularly freedom of movement) and security. For example, as one young highly educated Syrian man interviewed in Turkey explained:

*"I would like to take the citizenship because it removes my movement and work obstacles."*

Several Syrian respondents in Turkey at the time of fieldwork expressed scepticism regarding their likely prospects of being granted citizenship. Sometimes this was because they did not trust that such policy announcements by the Turkish government actually came to anything, and more often their perception was that only the highly-educated or wealthy would be granted citizenship, such that there was no chance for the "ordinary man". Others knew that some people had been granted citizenship and expressed frustration regarding the lack of transparency and fairness regarding the eligibility and procedural requirements.

There were also some perceptions that being awarded citizenship would carry negative consequences - for example, one respondent raised the point that those granted citizenship would no longer be eligible for Kizilay cash aid (this is indeed current policy). Another Syrian respondent interviewed in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and who left Turkey at the end of 2017) viewed Turkey's citizenship policy as a means of exploiting (and constraining the freedoms) of highly-skilled Syrians who Turkey wanted to keep in the country. This respondent explained that he had a friend who had been offered a scholarship in another country but had not been allowed to leave Turkey, on the basis that he was a candidate to receive Turkish citizenship. This respondent had therefore decided against trying to move onwards from Turkey through resettlement because he thought it would be a wasted effort - resettlement would be a long process and, in the end, the Turkish government might stop him from going. Similar cases have been reported in the media, according to which highly-educated Syrians offered resettlement to the U.S. and Germany have been denied exit visas by the Turkish government (Hintz & Feehan, 2017).

The vignette question regarding citizenship asked: Please imagine that [you are still in Turkey and] you are one of the refugees who will be given Turkish citizenship. You find out that you will acquire citizenship very soon. What do you do? This question was asked to respondents in Turkey that had already indicated their aspiration to move onwards, and to respondents outside of Turkey whose decision-making

narratives suggested that they might have been willing to consider staying in Turkey. Therefore, the results focus on whether the opportunity for obtaining citizenship has the potential to influence decision making. Syrian respondents were much less inclined than the Afghan respondents to stay in Turkey if given Turkish citizenship. The majority of the Syrian respondents (11 out of the 18 who answered this question) said that Turkish citizenship would not make them want to stay in Turkey, largely because the rights that they would acquire through citizenship would not fundamentally change the negative experiences of their lives and future prospects in Turkey. For example, as one respondent interviewed in the Netherlands explained:

*"Frankly no [I would not stay in Turkey even with citizenship], because [...] you can't live a decent life there and one must work for 12 hours in Turkey just to get basic expenses."*

Only four Syrian respondents said that they would want, or would have wanted, to stay in Turkey if given citizenship. Three other Syrian respondents said that they would accept Turkish citizenship, but only with a view to this facilitating their legal onwards migration. This final statement is quite surprising as it contradicts the expectation that citizenship would be desired for creating 'permanency' in Turkey.

In contrast, the majority of Afghan respondents (12 of the 19 who answered this question) said that they would want to stay in Turkey if given Turkish citizenship, and for a few of these respondents it would be enough for them just to have legal residence. As one young man from Kabul (interviewed in Turkey) explained:

*"I would accept citizenship and stay in Turkey. If I can get the citizenship, here is safer. Living conditions are better if I can get citizenship. I can focus on my own education and I can find a job afterwards."*

However, seven Afghan respondents emphasized that Turkish citizenship would not incentivize them to stay in Turkey. Their reasoning followed similar lines to that of the Syrian respondents who expressed the same view. For example, as another young man (interviewed in the Netherlands) explained:

*"In Turkey, the only problem is not the passport. You work there but that money is just enough to spend for the daily food. It is not possible to have savings and build a future there."*

It is essential to reiterate that Afghans have fewer rights at present in Turkey than Syrians, and therefore the prospect of citizenship is a much larger step from this current position than it is for Syrians in Turkey.

### 6.2.3 Securitization of Turkey's External Borders and Increasing Internal Control Policies in Turkey

This section discusses the impacts of external and internal controls in Turkey, which have made it more difficult for refugees and migrants to: first, enter Turkey; second, access protection and achieve a sense of security and stability in Turkey; and third, to exit Turkey and move onwards to the EU. The cumulative effect of these policies has been to squeeze Turkey's growing refugee and migrant population between deteriorating conditions in Turkey and reduced prospects for accessing better conditions in other asylum destinations.

As discussed in Section 5, more recently arrived refugees have found it harder to access protection in Turkey. This is firstly because of the administrative and physical controls on entry to Turkey from Syria, (introduced from 2015 onwards and overviewed in Section 2.3), which have made it increasingly difficult and dangerous to enter Turkey.

Many (7) Syrian respondents reported their experiences of violence by Turkish border guards (either threatened or actually committed) when they crossed from Syria to Turkey between 2015 and 2018. One respondent (interviewed in Turkey) who entered Turkey in 2016 stated:

*"When we were on the Syrian side of the border we saw a vehicle of the Turkish border forces checking the border line, so when it moved away we crossed the border and rushed inside Turkey to escape the border forces. But they just saw us and started shooting at us, I felt that the bullets were passing very close to me, just between my feet! So we started trying to run faster in the mud to survive, but two men were shot in the hand and stomach. I was very afraid and hid myself behind a tree for more than one hour. The border guards started shouting out and searching us with the dogs and searchlights, but we did not respond and kept on hiding until they had gone."*

Similar incidences of gunfire shot by Turkish border guards (either seemingly in warning or to injure or kill) were described by other respondents. An NGO worker confirmed that the securitization of Turkey's border with Syria has increased.

Second, there is evidence from the interview data with refugees and migrants and other key stakeholders that more recently arrived Syrian refugees have been unable to access temporary protection status, and that protection risks for Syrians and Afghans have increased as a result of new controls on internal movement through Turkey. As a lawyer working in an NGO and interviewed in Turkey explained, these new administrative restrictions have created a catch-22-type situation in which refugees are compelled to undertake irregular movement (at the risk of arrest and deportation, and without access to support services) in order to access protection status in provinces where registration is still available. As second key stakeholder respondent from the INGO sector described, these restrictions on registration and internal movement have also made it harder

for registered refugees to support themselves in Turkey. Because registration for Temporary Protection is no longer available in Istanbul and other larger economic hubs, refugees are increasingly registered in smaller cities where the opportunities for income generation are scarcer and from which they cannot leave without obtaining permission.

Third, there is an increasing threat of forced return from Turkey. President Erdogan's government has announced that Syrian refugees have been, and will continue to be, returned to areas of Syria that, following Turkish military operations, Turkey has declared safe. This is, moreover, a relatively soft policy compared to the policy intentions that opposition parties have declared in the context of Turkey's 2018 general elections, and which included the threat to forcibly return all Syrians to Syria. Civil society actors have reported incidences of the coerced or forced return of Syrians to Syria, which they have related to the reduced legislative safeguards under Turkey's post-coup State of Emergency (Amnesty International, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Regarding the security that Afghan refugees and migrants have in Turkey, their access to international protection is more limited than that of Syrians. For Afghans, registration as asylum seekers in Istanbul has always been close to impossible. Most commonly, Afghan asylum seekers living in Istanbul and waiting for conditional refugee status are instead registered in other "satellite cities". At the same time, there is a long established Afghan community in Istanbul and many Afghans live there with status (as they are not newly arrived asylum seekers) or irregularly. Moreover, and as discussed by the refugee and migrant as well as key stakeholder interviewees, the threat of forced return for Afghans has increased in recent years. According to one NGO worker interviewed in Turkey, deportations of undocumented Afghans started to increase in 2016, while other reporting points to the mass deportations of unregistered Afghans which started to occur in early 2018 (ECRE, 2018; Pitonak, 2018). This was described by one Afghan respondent interviewed in Turkey who said:

*"The life in Turkey was easier 8 months ago. I used to walk around in parks, on the coast etc. There was almost no problem. Yet, I cannot go out freely anymore. I am afraid to be caught by the police. They deport illegal Afghans here."*

Even for registered Afghan refugees, it appears that Turkey has become an increasingly hostile environment. As one Afghan woman with protection status in Turkey (and interviewed in Turkey) explained:

*"[...] in the last two years racism and discrimination has increased a lot, even in the DGMM the officers and the translators behave badly with people compared with three years ago."*



The increasing barriers to accessing protection in Turkey, on the one hand, and the increasing threat of forced return, on the other, would seem to relate to a politics of securitization pursued by the Turkish government following the attempted coup d'état in July 2016. It is not only refugees and migrants in Turkey who have suffered in the post-coup environment, but it is also very understandable if already-vulnerable migrants and refugees in Turkey perceive their futures in Turkey as highly insecure.

Finally, at the same time that securitization policies have markedly eroded prospects for stability and security in Turkey, strengthened external controls on Turkey's borders with the EU have significantly reduced the capabilities of refugees and migrants to leave Turkey and seek refuge and stability elsewhere. As discussed in Section 6.1, a small number of refugees and migrants reported their understanding that the route onwards from Turkey had become much more difficult since 2016 as result of increased border controls (although it was not always clear whether they referred specifically to controls on Turkey's borders with Greece and Bulgaria, or to controls further downstream in the Western Balkans, or to both). This difficulty in attributing impact to the EU-Turkey Statement specifically was also reflected in interviews with key stakeholders in Turkey.

Two government officials interviewed in Turkey argued that Turkey's borders had always been well protected, and refuted suggestions that border controls increased as a result of the EU-Turkey Statement. According to these officials, as well as to coastguards interviewed by the research team for a related study, Turkey's borders were already tightly policed prior to the EU-Turkey Statement (İçduygu & Aksel, Forthcoming). These stakeholders made particular reference to Turkey's longstanding participation in the EU's Integrated Border Management system since 2006. Heck and Hess (2017) have similarly argued that Turkey's border dynamics need to be understood not only as an outcome of the EU-Turkey Statement, but rather within the broader context of its longer collaboration with EU policy objectives as part of accession negotiations, as well as with regard to the development of its own asylum system and to regional politics in the Middle East. The coastguards interviewed did point to a recent increase in coordination meetings between Greek and Bulgarian border guards and other actors in Turkey (which include the Gendarmerie, governorates and NGOs) (İçduygu & Aksel, Forthcoming), and other experts from academia and government specified that that these coordination meetings had increased since the EU-Turkey Statement.

Moreover, fieldwork by Karadağ (2019) has identified a step-change in the border policing activities by the Turkish Coast Guard after the EU-Turkey Statement. Immediately following the March 2016 Statement both the Turkish and Greek authorities increased and strengthened their surveillance and patrolling activities, alongside the deployment of Frontex and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations (Karadağ, 2019). Following the Statement, the operations of the Turkish

Coast Guard were also newly centralised and coordination was enhanced (Karadağ, forthcoming). Between August 2016 and February 2018 the Turkish Coast Guard also received 20,000,000 EUR in funding from the Facility for Refugees in Turkey to support capacity building through the provision of advanced technical equipment and training (Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, 2019a). A further 60,000,000 EUR of Facility funding was committed to migration management in Turkey, and focussed particularly on the detection and removal of irregular migrants in Turkey (Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, 2019b). Karadağ (forthcoming) further points to the introduction of internal controls by the Turkish Police and Gendarmerie following the EU-Turkey Statement: highway checkpoints were implemented to prevent refugees and migrants from reaching Turkey's borders (Karadağ, forthcoming). Government stakeholders also confirmed that more internal controls have been introduced in the post-2015 period. A 2019 European Commission Report on Turkey supports these findings, concluding that the reduction in irregular crossings from Turkey to Greece post-EU Turkey Statement has been supported by Turkey's intensified efforts to prevent sea departures, the Turkish Coast Guard's rescue operations, the introduction of internal controls on movement within Turkey, and by the relocation of people under temporary protection who have attempted irregular onwards movement to temporary accommodation centres in Turkey's eastern provinces (European Commission, 2019c).'

Government stakeholders interviewed for this research further commented that the increased securitization of both the Greek and Bulgarian sides of the borders, and the increased use of violence as a deterrent measure by these border guards, must also be considered within the context of reduced irregular outflows from Turkey. Nonetheless, the government officials interviewed in Turkey were not willing to attribute the decrease in irregular crossings from Turkey directly to the EU-Turkey Statement.

### 6.3 External Migration Control and Deterrence Policies along the Western Balkans Route to Europe

Throughout the period of interest in this research (2015-2018), there have been multiple external border control policies implemented by different national and regional (EU level) actors. This section concludes with a reflection on the role of these external migration control and deterrence policies in influencing decision making.

There was a broad consensus amongst the key stakeholders interviewed in all field sites that deterrence policies do not "stop" migrants who want to migrate, but just force them to find another route in order to achieve their objectives, as has been discussed substantially in the academic literature (Castles, 2004; Hein de Haas, 2011; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schapendonk, van Liempt, Schwartz, & Steel, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Üstübcici & İçduygu, 2018).

These respondents frequently used variations on a “water” metaphor to describe how, when faced with a new barrier to their onwards movement, refugee and migrant flows will, like water, shift pressure onto other routes and seek out new cracks through which to continue on their course. As one INGO representative described, many refugees and migrants have a clear goal in mind and “[...] nothing will change their minds. They are risking their lives to go to Europe, and nothing will stop them”. This “substitution effect”, whereby the implementation of new deterrence policies on one route re-directs flows onto routes, was amply demonstrated in the migrant and refugee interviews, as well as in reporting on flows through the region.

Regarding the border restrictions and closures imposed towards the end of 2015 and which snowballed towards the eventual official closure of the route in March 2016, the few respondents who were travelling during this time reported that the failed “March of Hope” to Edirne, the closing of Hungary’s border, and the Greek-North Macedonian border closures had little impact on their decision making. It should be noted that this is in contrast to the views of a couple of key stakeholders: two key stakeholders based in Serbia argued that Victor Orban’s announcement that a wall would be built on Hungary’s border triggered higher flows, and one key stakeholder based in the Netherlands thought that the completion of this wall contributed to the reduction in flows. The refugee and migrant respondents, however, explained that, firstly, their determination to reach Europe was such that news of these border controls and associated risks did not dissuade them from continuing their journeys, and, second, they were aware that the situation at that time was highly volatile and they were confident that a route would open up for them at some point. For example, as one Syrian respondent (interviewed in the Netherlands) who was in transit along the route in 2015 explained:

*“[...] the situation there [at] this time, especially in 2015 the situation was almost everyday chang[ing], really every day, every hour sometimes. Now it’s open, after one hour it’s closed, so the situation wasn’t stable, so we yeah, we just go. And I’ll tell you something, for me and for all the people if you make the first step you can’t go back.”*

Following the closure of the main route which had been used in 2015 and 2016, when border controls were imposed indefinitely and further strengthened (this includes, for example, decisions by Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia to close their land borders to refugees and migrants, and to Hungary’s new border wall), it is clear that old routes have re-emerged in prominence. First, as evidenced by official statistics on flows, and by the key stakeholders and refugees and migrants interviewed for this research, the tighter policing of the Turkey-Greece sea crossing and the practice of containment on the Greek Hotspots has resulted in the re-emergence of the Turkey-Greece land crossing via the Evros river and land

crossings from Turkey to Bulgaria. Stakeholders interviewed in Turkey emphasized that one of the reasons why migrants in Turkey are less likely to attempt the irregular crossing to the Aegean islands is related to deteriorating conditions in the Hotspots where their stay would likely be protracted. Many migrants and refugees in Turkey have received the information that crossing to the Aegean islands is higher-risk because of the increased controls by coast guards and also because it would then be necessary to arrange further smuggling to cross from the islands to the Greek mainland. At the same time, they are also well aware of the strict controls and violent practices at the Turkey-Greece and Turkey-Bulgaria land borders.

Second, fieldwork in the Netherlands and in the Western Balkans suggested that, given the increased difficulties transiting through the Western Balkans, more refugees and migrants may be attempting to travel by air from Greece, and may only resort to the land route if they cannot access the air route (for example, due to language or financial barriers), or if they are unsuccessful in their attempts to leave by air.

Third, the emergence of the new ‘Southern’ sub-route through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina can also be explained by border controls. The explanations given by key stakeholders varied in terms of the importance they attributed to different border controls, but agreed that the emergence of the ‘Southern’ or ‘Coastal’ route is the result of increased controls on entering Serbia from North Macedonia and Bulgaria, as well as Croatia, Hungary and Romania’s more effective policing of their own borders. Faced with the increasing difficulty of transiting through these countries, refugees and migrants have “pushed further south” where access to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina was relatively easy from Serbia, and where there was a “window of opportunity” to continue onwards to Croatia because the Bosnian-Croatian border was relatively unprotected. This was reflected in the refugee and other migrant interview data, where respondents who had crossed from Serbia to Bosnia and Herzegovina had heard from other migrants and refugees on the route that it was easier to cross into Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina than from Serbia, and could even be done without the use of a smuggler. For a couple of respondents, it was also an important factor in their decision making that they had struggled to access accommodation in Serbia as winter was approaching and they faced the prospect of a protracted stay, and they heard that there was new and good accommodation facilities available in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Simultaneously, according to key stakeholders interviewed in the Western Balkans, there are also circular flows within the region. These have included: some refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina who have been unable to continue onwards and have therefore returned to Serbia for the winter months where they judge the accommodation facilities to be better; some migrants who have been unable to enter Bosnia and Herzegovina directly from Montenegro and who then go

back to Montenegro, enter Serbia and from Serbia continue onto Bosnia and Herzegovina; and some refugees and migrants who find themselves stranded in the Western Balkans, and who therefore return to Greece in order to try and travel directly to other EU countries via intra-Schengen flights. As one key stakeholder respondent described, although there may be a period of relative stasis as refugees and migrants (and smuggling networks) find themselves blocked in a particular direction, it is inevitable that in time new strategies and routes are identified and established. Key stakeholder respondents also emphasized that, although a new route might be more circuitous, if it offered the possibility of reaching the intended destination, it would be used.

#### 6.4 Summary

Returning to Section 3 of this report, different forms of policies - be these external or internal controls, migration-specific or migration-relevant, or favourable or adverse for refugees and migrants - can have different influences on refugees and migrants' decision making processes. In this section, we have focused on migration-specific policies with a favourable intention to extend rights to refugees, such as the ESSN and employment and citizenship opportunities; on the reverse side, we have focussed on internal and external migration control policies that aim to limit movement and prevent migration flows. Internal control policies have been discussed with regard to the restrictions of refugees and migrants' internal movement within Turkey, as well as their more limited access to protection in Turkey and the increased threat of expulsion from Turkey. External migration controls have been discussed with regard to the deterrence and prevention policies implemented on Turkey's borders with Syria and with the EU.

Two important findings are worth repeating here. First, for Syrian refugees the results reiterate the findings of Section 5 and previous research (Kuschminder & Koser, 2017) that the favourable migration-specific policies to extend rights to

refugees in Turkey are not enough to change decision making to stay in Turkey. It is quite striking that the majority of Syrians that had already left Turkey or who were in Turkey and wanting to leave stated that even with the offer of citizenship in Turkey they would not want to stay in Turkey, and further, that citizenship was only desirable as a mechanism to move onwards more easily. Clearly, the opportunity of citizenship would have a different effect on those wanting to stay in Turkey and provides a meaningful opportunity for integration for this group. However, taking into account the cumulative effect of conditions in Turkey, it may be concluded that one favourable migration-specific policy intervention cannot easily change the motivations of Syrian refugees who want to move onwards and convince them instead to stay.

For Afghans, the possibility of favourable migration policies had an entirely different effect. For Afghan respondents, access to legal residence, legal employment and the possibility of citizenship may be enough in most cases to change decision making to stay in Turkey. This is also a striking finding relating to the way in which decision-making processes relate to nationality, and the potential power of legal rights in enabling Afghans to make the active choice to stay in Turkey. This is most likely due to the fact that Afghans have fewer rights and entitlements in Turkey than Syrians due to the two-tier system of protection, and second, that Afghans were generally accustomed to greater insecurity and fewer opportunities in Afghanistan and Iran, compared to Syrians in Syria (pre-crisis).

Second, in line with previous research, the results demonstrate that most respondents are knowledgeable about the risks of onwards migration and that external border controls and deterrence measures do not stop migration aspirations, but rather reduce (physical and financial) capabilities for successful migration. In only a few cases did they deter onwards migration attempts via irregular routes (and largely only among Syrians, whose conditions in Turkey are somewhat better).

Respondents reported having multiple migration attempts (up to 13) on different routes to try and move onwards from Turkey. The findings in this section also show how circular migration patterns have emerged amongst the Western Balkans states as individuals who find themselves blocked in one direction seek out better short-term reception conditions and an opportunity for a path forwards. There appears to be a strong consensus amongst the key stakeholders and respondents that movement onwards is more difficult post-2016. That difficulty, however, does not reduce aspirations nor debilitate agency and refugees and migrants continue to develop strategies to move onwards despite the risks involved and the increasing economic and psychological burden of the journey.



## 7. Conclusion

The EU-Turkey Statement has been a controversial policy of the EU to reduce migration flows to Europe. This report has focused specifically on the role of the EU-Turkey Statement in influencing refugees and migrants' decision making. Multiple facets of the EU-Turkey Statement have therefore not been included in this report, such as details regarding returns under the one-for-one arrangement, or the resettlement of Syrians from Turkey to the EU.

The overall aim of this report has been to unpack the changing dynamics of the migration flows on the Western Balkans route from 2015-2018 including: the policy environment regarding the migration context on the Western Balkans route; the decision making of refugees and migrants to take this route (or not); and the overall aspirations and destination choices of migrants on this route, particularly at the starting point of staying in Turkey or not. This has been achieved by examining a timeline of key events and policy changes during this time period and through original data collection with 96 Afghan and Syrian refugees and migrants and 34 key stakeholder interviews.

This report began in Section 2 with an overview of key events along the Western Balkans route in 2015 and 2016, the build-up to and implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, and the broader changing policy environment in Turkey. Key points in this section, that have not been highlighted in other studies, were the increased securitization of the Syria-Turkey border starting in late 2015 and the increased internal control policies in Turkey which restricted refugees and migrants' movements. As has been shown throughout this report, both of these policies, coupled with other factors, have had significant impacts on refugees' experiences and decision making.

Section 3 presented the conceptual framework for this study, which consisted of two parts: first, a multidimensional model of refugee and migrant decision making in transit, and second, a categorization of migration-specific and migration-relevant policies that may influence refugees and migrants' decision making. The conceptual model of decision making in transit has been applied in Section 5 for the analysis of respondents' decision-making processes and Section 6 focuses on the role of migration-specific policies in decision making.

Section 4 specified the methodology used in this research, including the case selection, timeline methodology and interview methodology. The timeline has been used to inform Section 2, 5, and 6, and both the refugee and migrant and key stakeholder interviews have been the focus of the analysis (in Sections 5 and 6).

Section 5 and Section 6 present the study's following core findings. In Section 5, it is demonstrated that active decisions regarding whether to stay or move onwards are primarily made in Turkey. This reflects the staged migration patterns that

characterize migration flows on the Eastern Mediterranean route within which Turkey is the first destination country. Afghans have had a long history of migrating to Turkey (since the 1980s) and, as a result of the Syrian crisis, there are now established communities of both Afghans and Syrians in Turkey. The presence of co-ethnic communities in Turkey increases the likelihood that others will seek to settle there, and, as evidenced in this study's findings, decision making is therefore more nuanced in Turkey as respondents cited a number of reasons for actively choosing Turkey as their intended destination. This situation contrasts with the types of decisions made in the Western Balkans countries, where respondents did not view these countries as places in which to settle. Instead, decision making in the Western Balkans focuses on how, when and via which route to move onwards.

Second, Section 5 indicates key differences between the decision making of Afghans and Syrians. As reflected in other research, the decision-making processes of these two groups are impacted differently by different factors, resulting in different aspirations and outcomes. Afghans were more likely to want to migrate onwards from Turkey, and less likely to be deterred by the risks of onwards movement. This can be largely attributed to the fact that they have much more limited access to rights in Turkey compared to Syrians. This is further explored in Section 6, which illustrates the differing impacts of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey on Syrian and Afghan refugees. Unintentionally, a two-tier system has developed for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees in Turkey. As a result, Afghans are more likely to state that they would stay in Turkey if they had greater access to rights and opportunities in Turkey, particularly regarding residence rights and a path to citizenship. This was not the same for Syrians, who already have more rights in Turkey, despite the precarity inherent to the Temporary Protection status granted to Syrians. Further research would need to take into account more recent developments which have occurred over the summer of 2019. These include the increasing securitization of migration within Turkey, reflected in recent media coverage on deportations of Syrians back to Syria (Fahim & Zakaria, 2019; Kampouris, 2019). Concurrently, the new Greek government plans closer collaboration with the EU to strengthen migration controls as a response to the rising number of arrivals on the Aegean islands in the summer of 2019. These migration-specific policies are likely to change migrant and refugees' perceptions of conditions in Turkey and in Greece, with potential impacts on their decision making.

Section 6 also shows that respondents are knowledgeable about the risks involved in onwards migration and about the increase in external and internal border control policies that have been implemented on the route since late 2015. The knowledge of these risks deters aspirations for some refugees and migrants, and particularly Syrians, but not for all. This relates back to the



findings presented in Section 5, that most of the respondents in this study wanted to migrate onwards and only considered staying in countries along the Western Balkans route when they had experienced multiple failed onwards migration attempts and were exhausted by the journey.

### 7.1 Study Limitations

There are several limitations within this study. First, the overall sample size is relatively small compared to the population of both Afghans and Syrians impacted by the EU-Turkey Statement. This is most relevant in the Turkey case where there are 3.6 million registered Syrians and 370,000 registered Afghans. This research focused on a particular profile of refugees and migrants living in Turkey. The refugees and migrants who participated in the interviews in Turkey were mostly people who were less settled in Turkey and who more often aspired to move onwards to Europe. The interviews in Turkey only collected data on respondents' aspirations - actual movement could not be captured as no follow-up interviews were conducted. As mentioned, other studies have found that migration aspirations for movement onwards from Turkey may not actually lead to actual movement. Furthermore, to draw a conclusion about the relationship between integration and decision making, further research is needed. While the findings elicit several important considerations for understanding the role of specific policies in Turkey, this study is not designed to measure the impact of social assistance on refugee livelihoods in Turkey. More research is needed on whether access to social assistance improves livelihoods and whether, in return, this would provide a motivation to stay in Turkey<sup>1</sup>.

Second, it is recognized that the experiences and decision making of Afghans and Syrians are not necessarily generalizable to other nationality groups. However, the findings within this research are similar to those of other studies which represent a wider range of nationalities (Koser and Kuschminder, 2016; Duvell, 2018).

Third, the research questions guiding this study and, as a result, this report have placed a central emphasis on the role of policies in influencing decision making. As highlighted in Section 3 of this report, there are multiple types of policies that impact migration decision making. In this report, we have only been able to focus on migration-specific policies. This is firstly due to the high number of migration-specific policies that have been implemented between 2015-2018; and second, the focus of this research is on the EU-Turkey Statement. It is possible, and quite likely, that other migration-relevant policies have an impact on decision making such as policies regulating Turkey's employment sector and migration-

relevant policies in destination countries. Arguably, contextual variables such as Turkey's declining economy and high inflation also have impacts. It was beyond the scope of this research to assess all of the migration-relevant policies and contextual variables in decision making, but this is an important consideration for further research.

Finally, it was not possible to conduct interviews with smugglers for this research, which is an important limitation. As stated in Section 4 of this report, smugglers tend to be better informed than refugees and migrants regarding policies and routes, and therefore would be expected to have more information on how the EU-Turkey Statement has influenced routes and decisions of refugees and migrants. Further research is necessary in this regard.

### 7.2 The EU-Turkey Statement and Refugees' and Migrants' Decision Making

Returning to the core sub-questions of this study, this section reflects on the relationship between the EU-Turkey Statement and refugees and migrants' decision making.

#### What explanations are there for the sharp decrease in the number of refugees and migrants on the Balkans route even before the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect?

As illustrated in Section 2 and has been shown by several other authors (Duvell, 2018; Spijkerboer, 2016; van Liempt et al., 2017) flows had already decreased by the time of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. Flows likely decreased due to the closure of the Balkans route and winter weather. Part of this decrease can be attributed to the JAP and policy changes implemented in Turkey. Additionally, from our analysis we argue that flows decreased due to increased securitization in Turkey regarding refugees, including the closure of Turkey's border with Syria.

These factors can be argued to have continued to contribute to the decrease in arrivals after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement on 20 March 2016. In addition, the increased patrolling of the sea, rise in smuggling costs, and increased internal controls on movement have acted as barriers to onwards migration movements from Turkey. The Facility for Refugees in Turkey has had impacts on a range of aspects of refugees' living conditions in Turkey. However, the scope of its coverage is limited (and does not extend to those who have not secured status in Turkey), and the extent of its impact on individual lives is, as it stands, unlikely to change aspirations for onwards movement. Facility programming doubtless provides urgently-needed relief and assistance to beneficiaries, which may reduce the strength of some factors

<sup>1</sup>This question will be explored through the EU-funded ADMIGOV research project (<http://admigov.eu/>), which will investigate the impact of development-related policies on migration flows.

motivating onwards movement (although none of the study respondents described any such impact on their decision making). What was clear from the interview data is that many refugees and migrants in Turkey currently have multiple and significant reasons for wanting to build a life elsewhere, and further progress in improving beneficiaries' longer-term security and socio-economic prospects in Turkey is needed to achieve a tipping point which would enable the active choice to stay in Turkey.

#### **What are the decision making factors of refugees and migrants when choosing to leave Turkey before and after the EU-Turkey Statement?**

The core objective of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey was to improve conditions for refugees. In many ways, this has been achieved as initiatives such as the ESSN card are a helpful source of day-to-day support for nearly one third of refugees in Turkey. At the same time, however, conditions for refugees in Turkey have on the whole deteriorated due to rising inflation, increased competition for jobs and rental accommodation, as well as heightened political instability and a shrinking protection environment for refugees and migrants in Turkey. In this study, we find the same results as previous research conducted prior to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement (Duvell, 2018; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016) that reported that refugees and migrants wanted to leave Turkey due to the poor conditions that offered inadequate protection and prospects for the longer term. Inadequate living conditions continue to be a primary driver of aspirations for onwards movement; for those that receive the ESSN, this much-needed cash transfer is still not enough to live above an absolute bare minimum. Respondents have been clear that the ESSN does not change their aspirations for onwards movement, which continues to be driven by a wide range of factors, mostly relating to challenges faced in Turkey. Legal status for both Syrians and Afghans continues to be insecure (and access to protection status is increasingly restricted for both groups), creating a situation of "permanent temporariness" and heightened fears of arrest and deportation. Over a third of Syrian children are still not in school and only Afghan children with international protection status – which the majority do not hold – have the opportunity to attend school. Barriers to accessing healthcare services is another common problem. The vast majority of employment opportunities are informal and in low-skilled factory work where refugees report degrading treatment. The list continues. In line with previous research, this study finds that conditions in Turkey are the most important factor influencing the onwards migration decision.

A second important factor in refugees and migrants' decision making (that was not reported as frequently in 2015 research) is that the onwards migration decision is made to join family members that arrived in Europe in previous years (frequently in 2015). Due to the high flows in 2015, several European countries imposed restrictions on family

reunification, including the temporary suspension of family reunification rights for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, making it difficult or impossible for family members to join those who had already arrived. In this research 13 of the 44 individuals interviewed in transit in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were seeking to join their family members in EU countries. This is an important consideration of an unintended policy implication.

An important new development from previous research is that, in contrast to earlier research that suggested that those who wanted to move on from Turkey to the EU had already done so by the end of 2015 (Duvell, 2018), we find that since early 2016 there is an increasing population of 'stuck' refugees and migrants in Turkey. There are two central factors that explain this involuntary immobility. First, stronger external migration controls and deterrence measures have made it more difficult to leave Turkey and there has been a concomitant rise in the cost of smugglers. Respondents reported making several failed attempts to leave Turkey as they were turned back by police and border guards. Each attempt was costly and being able to leave Turkey successfully has become much more challenging. Of the 42 respondents who left Turkey post-March 2016, 16 (35%) described multiple attempts to leave before they were successful (up to 15, although most commonly between 2 and 5). Similarly, of the five respondents interviewed in Turkey who had already tried to move onwards from Turkey, four had attempted multiple crossings (between 4 and 13 attempts). In comparison, none of the 17 respondents who left Turkey in 2015 or before March 2016 reported having to make multiple attempts to leave Turkey.

Second, it has become increasingly difficult to pay for smuggler fees due to deteriorating economic conditions in Turkey, including competition for informal jobs and the impact of inflation on daily living costs. Our findings suggest that of those 19 respondents in Turkey who want to move onwards, 8 reported that they had so far failed in their previous attempts and/or had not managed to accumulate the necessary resources to attempt (another) irregular crossing. The smuggling costs reported by our respondents indicated that the prices paid for the Turkey-Greece crossing have become highly varied since 2016: between 2015 and 2018/2019 the average price quoted by respondents had increased roughly 400 percent. Thus, although the aspiration to migrate onwards still appears high (reported by 19 of 30 respondents in Turkey), the capabilities to do so are restricted by increased smuggling costs and external control policies to deter movements.

#### **To what extent do policy interventions - specifically the EU-Turkey Statement - impact refugees and migrants' decision-making regarding routes and destination choices?**

The implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement on 20 March 2016 led to two important considerations for refugees and migrants in Turkey. First, after a short period of time it became clear that newly arrived refugees and migrants in Greece were

stuck on the islands and this information filtered back to those still in Turkey. Going by sea to Greece was thus not only a more difficult option, but it was widely perceived that conditions on the islands were significantly poorer compared to 2015. This has been reflected in changing flows which have seen an increase in detections on Turkey's land borders in 2018.

Second, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey has had different impacts on different nationality groups. In this study, this is quite clear in that 10 of the 19 Syrians interviewed in Turkey wanted to move onwards from Turkey compared to nine of the 11 Afghan interviewees in Turkey (19 of 30 total respondents in Turkey aspired to move onwards). The sample size of respondents in this study is relatively small, so clearly this interpretation needs to be taken with caution, and it must also be recognised that Afghans have more restricted access to protection and legal rights in Turkey compared to Syrians, which also contributes to their higher aspirations to leave Turkey. However, the Facility for Refugees has compounded the two-tier system in Turkey for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees. This was reflected strongly in the interviews with Afghans who understood that they were not given the same rights and services as Syrians, but commonly did not understand why.

### 7.3 Overarching Conclusions and Implications

Migrant decision making is multi-faceted and policies can only have a limited effect. In this report we focus on specific policies and their role in decision making, recognising that decision making is complex and influenced by multiple factors (as shown in the conceptual model outlined in Section 3 and explained further). Consistent with earlier research, this study found that the most significant factors for refugees and migrants' decisions regarding onwards movement from Turkey continue to be: employment, legal rights, quality of life, and family reunification. All of these elements are highly influenced by the policy environment; but individual policies may have uneven impacts on the lived experience of different

refugees and migrants and may carry varying weight in their individual decision making processes.

Regarding the role of the EU-Turkey Statement within these decision making processes, the Statement included policies to both strengthen support for refugees in Turkey, and to control irregular migration through the one-for-one arrangement and external migration control policies. The EU-Turkey Statement did not have an explicit role in respondents decision making, as few knew of the deal, and those who demonstrated some knowledge of it often gave information which diverged considerably from the Statement's stated policy intentions. At the same time, however, the EU-Turkey Statement clearly did have significant effects on decision making through its implementation of external controls which have further constrained refugees and migrants' capabilities for onwards migration. This connection was not always clear to refugees and migrants, which reflects the important policy information gap discussed in Section 4 of this report. On the whole, refugees and migrants were highly aware that the route, through the Western Balkans, was now closed and much more difficult.

The results of the research lead to three overarching conclusions and implications.

1. It is clear that the EU-Turkey Statement has had clear and notable impacts. It is undeniable that flows have decreased from the EU-Turkey statement, considering the policy changes that began in November 2015 in Turkey with the JAP and continued until post implementation in Greece in 2016. It is uncertain, however, if this is a temporary or long-term shift. At the time of writing in 2019, arrivals from Turkey to Greece have been increasing (although clearly not to the same scale as in 2015), and, as this research clearly shows, aspirations to move onwards from Turkey are still high.



Although not the central focus of this report, there is also sufficient evidence to conclude that the EU-Turkey Statement has impacted smuggling dynamics in Turkey. This is demonstrated by: 1) the more diverse smuggling routes and prices reported by respondents as compared to the cost of the standard sea crossing to Greece in 2015; 2) the smuggling market's shift from visibility to be clandestine; and 3) by the high number of failed onwards migration attempts. It is not possible to assess, based on this research, how the EU-Turkey Statement has impacted the business model of smugglers, and further research would therefore be necessary to understand the ways that recruitment, profits, and smuggling approaches have changed.

2. The Facility for Refugees in Turkey, although an immense investment of the EU, has not greatly changed decision making among many refugees and migrants in Turkey. The central reason for this is that economic conditions in Turkey are deteriorating at a faster rate than the Facility can correct through its policies and investments. Resultantly, a policy intended to reduce vulnerability and improve conditions for refugees in Turkey is encapsulated within a system of structural insecurity and rising vulnerabilities.

A core element of the Facility is the ESSN that provides important cash assistance for the most vulnerable registered refugees (therefore excluding unregistered Afghans). A recent assessment of the ESSN by the WFP, with primarily Syrian and Iraqi refugees, found that the ESSN helps to lift beneficiary households' income above the threshold of the MEB, thus reducing their poverty levels. However, the WFP assessment also found that ESSN beneficiaries remain poorer overall than refugees deemed ineligible for the ESSN or who have not applied for the ESSN (WFP, 2018). This demonstrates that amongst Syrian and Iraqi refugees, beneficiaries of the ESSN are the poorest. While this cash assistance is urgently needed by beneficiaries for their day-to-day survival, the impact of these cash transfers on individual lives is still relatively small. It is therefore unsurprising that the evidence from respondents demonstrates that neither receiving the ESSN nor the prospect of receiving the ESSN influences decision making to stay in Turkey rather than move onwards.

In terms of the Facility's major investments in education and health, the Facility has made large investments into health and education, but refugees and migrants continue to be frustrated by the difficulties in accessing both health and education in Turkey (and in some cases by the quality of the services offered). Despite investments of the Facility into both health and education, health and education are both still cited as a driver of aspirations to leave Turkey.

The Facility has not been able to address wider issues such as refugees and migrants' legal rights and opportunities for integration into the formal labour market in Turkey. Access

to Temporary and International Protection status in Turkey is increasingly restricted, and the legal rights and security that these statuses confer often fall short of respondents' expectations. It is clear that employment is a central factor driving aspirations for onwards movement, and the evidence suggests that formal employment that offers decent working conditions and wages is a factor that could potentially change decision making to stay in Turkey. Recognising that the Facility has not been able to substantially increase formal employment, this is an important area for policy consideration.

On the whole, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey is clearly an indispensable component of humanitarian aid in Turkey that protects beneficiaries against the worst immediate effects of forced displacement (for example, in terms of poverty, missed schooling and health risks). However, given respondents' strong desires for longer-term security and better socio-economic prospects, current Facility programming has not played a central role in the decision making of refugees and migrants in this study. Further research would be needed to expand the understanding of the Facility's role in refugee livelihoods and decision making in Turkey.

3. The current context – more than three years on from the initial implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement – has important differentiating elements from 2015. In 2015, it was thought that those who wanted to move onwards from Turkey were on their way or had already left Turkey. Today, the situation is different with an increasing population of refugees and migrants 'stuck' in Turkey and experiencing 'involuntary immobility'. Aspirations for onwards mobility appear to still be high amongst the respondents interviewed, with 19 of the 30 respondents interviewed in Turkey aspiring to move onwards (and for many of the same reasons that motivated onwards movement prior to the EU-Turkey Statement). In particular, Afghans, most of whom do not have access to international protection or any other legal status in Turkey, aspire to move onwards. As mentioned, although aspirations for migration are still high, capabilities for onwards movement are greatly reduced, and it is unclear how many respondents will be able to actually realise their migration aspirations. The implications of having a 'stuck' population in Turkey – particularly in light of the shrinking access to international protection offered in Turkey – requires further reflection and consideration.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: List of key stakeholder interviewees

### Turkey

Number of representatives	Organisation (if consent given)	Stakeholder type
2	Anonymous	Government
2	Anonymous	IGO
5	Anonymous	NGO
2	Anonymous	Other civil society

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

1	Ministry of Security	Government
3	Border Police	Government
2	Service for Foreigners Affairs	Government
1	IOM	IGO
1	UNHCR	IGO

### Serbia

3	Ministry of Interior	Government
1	Commissariat for Refugees and Migration	Government
1	UNHCR	IGO
1	IOM	IGO
1	Belgrade Centre for Human Rights	NGO

### Netherlands

5	Ministry of Justice and Security	Government
3	Anonymous	Government

### Regional

2	IOM	IGO
1	Anonymous	IGO
1	Anonymous	NGO

## Appendix 2: Methodology for developing the Timeline of Events

### Step 1: Developing a criteria for events to include in the review

In establishing a criteria for events to include we focused on events and developments that were either relevant to the Western Balkans route specifically from 2015-2018, the EU-Turkey Statement, or to major changes in the EU's response to the so-called "migrant and refugee crisis". At this earlier stage of the research, the criteria were meant to be inclusive of all events that could potentially impact refugees and migrants' decision making.

Within this broad criteria, events were categorised as follows:

- Physical border controls (e.g. the construction of new fences, new patrol activities)
- Administrative border controls (e.g. new entry restrictions/ requirements)
- High-level dialogues (e.g. prominent meetings between political leaders at which they discussed policy relating to the so-called "refugee and migrant crisis")
- Major policy documents (e.g. action plans and agendas that set out policy approaches and strategies)
- Policy initiatives - at a national, regional and EU-level. At the EU-level we included all major policy developments relating

to the so-called "refugee and migrant crisis" (e.g. the development of the Hotspot approach, the resettlement scheme, the launch of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the EU-Turkey Statement). At the national level we focused on policies relating to refugees' and migrants' rights, reception, and opportunities for integration (e.g. freedom of movement, transport mechanisms, access to asylum, education services, citizenship). Policies on entry were instead included under physical and administrative border controls.

- Funding allocations (e.g. commitment of funds to help Turkey/Western Balkans countries address refugee and migrant inflows).
- Security/public order/migration-related incidents in Western Balkans/Turkey. This included protests, riots, police or military interventions, and high-profile cases of violence against or perpetrated by refugees and migrants. In selecting these events we were interested in those high-profile incidents that shaped public and political narratives and may have also impacted refugees' and migrants' decision making in Turkey and on the Western Balkans route.

- Major political interventions related to mixed flows through Turkey/ the Western Balkans. Similarly to above, we were interested in high-profile political interventions - such as Angela Merkel's speeches on welcoming Syrian refugees in Germany - that may have affected refugees' and migrants' decision-making.

This categorisation served to further specify the types of events for inclusion in the timeline. Relevant events were identified primarily according to the researchers' knowledge, local experts' knowledge, and google searches. Information on events was drawn from the media and news outlets, from government outlets (policy documents and announcements), and from reports within the grey literature. Snowball methods were also used to find further events from relevant sources. Relevant events were recorded in an excel spreadsheet which could be viewed according to each category of event or as a whole. For each event, we included: country, date, type of event, intended impact, comments on actual impact, and the source. The excel sheet was also designed to be filtered according to the relevant country/region. This process resulted in 167 events and developments. In addition to the categorisation overview above, some events/developments did not fit well into these categories and were labelled as "other". This occurred when an event did not fit into the initial typology but nevertheless seemed important to include as context and to give shape to the timeline (for example, Turkey's 2018 general election, important changes in the geography of mixed flows through the Balkans).

### Step 2: Constructing a "shortlist" of events

This longlist was then reviewed to identify a shortlist of key policies and events that would more usefully inform the development of the interview methodology and final report. In selecting events for this shortlist we chose to include:

- Only EU-level policy decisions that were: i) actually implemented; and ii) directly relevant to the Western Balkans route.
- Events and developments that we hypothesised would have had a trickle-down effect on the daily conditions and reality faced by refugees and migrants on the Western Balkans route (i.e. ability to travel freely, reception conditions, integration opportunities), or that refugees and migrants may have heard about (if not actually experienced themselves), and may therefore have affected their decision making.

We chose not to include in the shortlist the many funding allocations to Turkey/Western Balkan countries that were awarded between 2015 and 2018. This is because, although they are likely to have affected the reception conditions for refugees and migrants on this route, it did not seem possible at this point to trace when and how the funds were actually spent. It therefore did not seem useful to include these many funding provisions in the shortlist, as they would not necessarily give a useful picture of concrete changes along the route, and would add significant length to the shortlist.

Similarly, changes in national reception capacities (i.e. the opening of new centres, expansion/renovation of facilities etc.) were not included in the shortlist because this would add considerable length to the shortlist. However, the closure of 6 out of 19 of Turkey's refugee camps was included because it is reported to have displaced 132, 900 Syrians in Turkey and because, having only occurred in November 2018, we judged that it may come up in the subsequent interviews. The resulting 'shortlist' of events consists of approximately 50 events.

### Step 3: Determining events to be included in interview questions with refugees and other migrants

We used this shortlist of events to inform the refugee and migrant interview guide in order to be able to interact events and refugee and migrant decision making. In addition to the more general migration lifecycle questions, the interview guide included: 1) a list of questions which asked interviewees whether they had heard of specific events and whether, if so, these events had influenced their decision making; and 2) a list of hypothetical "vignette" questions which required the interviewee to imagine whether and how their decision making would change in response to a specific policy intervention. These two sets of questions were constructed based on the shortlisted timeline of events: the questions focused on events and policies that we hypothesised our respondents were most likely to be aware of, and which we expected to have the most significant impacts on their decision making.

# Management Summary: Decision Making on the Balkan Route and the EU-Turkey Statement

In 2015, there were higher than normal migration flows from Turkey to Greece and then via the Western Balkans to other European Union (EU) countries, leading to what has been termed Europe's 'refugee crisis'. In November 2015, a Joint Action Plan (JAP) was developed between the EU and Turkey to 'stop the crisis'. The result of the JAP was the implementation of the EU Turkey Statement, popularly known as the EU Turkey Deal, on 20 March 2016. The EU Turkey Statement has been a contentious policy that has created significant debate amongst actors within the EU. The objective of this report is to examine how the package of policies associated with the Statement influenced refugees and migrants' decision-making in Turkey and on the Western Balkans route to Europe between 2015 and 2018.

The primary research question guiding this study is: *How can the fluctuations in migration flows on the Balkans route from January 2015-December 2018 be explained?*

The core sub-questions guiding this research are:

- What explanations are there for the sharp decrease in the number of refugees and migrants on the Balkans route even before the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect?
- What are the decision making factors of refugees and migrants when choosing to leave Turkey before and after the EU-Turkey Statement?
- To what extent do policy interventions impact refugees and migrants' decision-making regarding routes and destination choices?

The EU Turkey Statement is considered in this report as inclusive of policy changes that occurred after the signing of JAP, therefore addressing the time period from November 2015 to post implementation of the EU Turkey Statement in March 2016. The reason for this is that the result of the JAP was the EU Turkey Statement itself and together these policies aimed to 'stop the crisis'. Immediate policy changes after the JAP included the government of Turkey leading raids of beaches, factories making life jackets and dinghies, and new visa requirements for Iraqis and Syrians entering Turkey.

The model used in this study to assess decision making recognizes that migrant decision making is influenced by a complex array of factors, and policies are one element within the larger complexity of decision making. Second, decision making is based on perceptions and information processing and consumption. Refugees and migrants' perceptions of any given policy or situation may then be factual, somewhat factual or completely misguided. This is of central importance when considering decision making, as decisions are taken based on these perceptions, which may in fact not reflect either the policy's actual intentions or implementation. This is a difficult issue to reconcile in research and policy formation and we have done our best to disentangle this

wherever possible within the report. Third, policies are not all equal and different elements of policies such as internal or external control policies, or migration-specific versus migration-relevant policies can have different influences on migration decision making. This report aims to un-pack the different components of the EU-Turkey Statement in order to explore how each part may or may not have influenced refugee and migrant decision making. Our analysis is restricted to focusing on the migration-specific policies in the current country and by destination countries (here focusing primarily on the EU as a regional actor). Migration-specific policy aims to influence migration processes and the position of migrants, for example through stricter physical border controls or through selective access to the labour market. We recognize that other policies may have an impact on decision making, however, given the vast expanse of migration-specific policies introduced in the 2015-2018 time period in Turkey and elsewhere, we do not have scope within this study to go beyond these policies and the EU-Turkey statement. Fourth, decision making in this study either reflects a previous decision that has been implemented when a respondent has already moved, or reflects a plan at the time of interview to move or stay. The migration decision reflected at the time of interview does not mean that the migration was realized. This is unknown within this study as interviews were only conducted at one moment in time.

The methodology for this study includes a literature review, construction of a timeline of events from 2015-2018, and original interviews with 38 key stakeholders and 96 Afghan and Syrian respondents across the four countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina (32), the Netherlands (32), Serbia (27), Turkey (41). These four countries have been chosen for their different functions in the migration process. Turkey as a country in which millions of migrants and refugees reside and is a starting country for a further journey to Europe, Serbia as a strategic transit country in 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina as a new transit country in 2017 and 2018, and the Netherlands as a destination country. Although a fair number of interviews have been conducted, the sample of refugees and migrants included in the study is quite small in comparison to the population of these groups, particularly in Turkey. Selective sampling was therefore used in Turkey to gather a diversity of cases and responses and thus cannot be viewed as representative of the overall population in Turkey. Further large-scale survey research would be required to give a more accurate picture of overall migrant intentions in Turkey.

## What explanations are there for the sharp decrease in the number of refugees and migrants on the Balkans route even before the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect?

The timeline reconstruction of this study shows that the stricter (physical) border surveillance in countries such as Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Austria prior to the



EU-Turkey statement was responsible for the decrease in the number of refugees and migrants.

### **What are the decision making factors of refugees and migrants when choosing to leave Turkey before and after the EU Turkey Statement?**

The core objective of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey was to improve conditions for refugees. In many ways, this has been achieved as initiatives such as the ESSN card are a vital source of day-to-day support for nearly one third of refugees in Turkey. At the same time, however, conditions for refugees in Turkey have not significantly changed. In this study, we find the same results as previous research from prior to the implementation of the EU Turkey Statement (Duvell, 2018; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016) that refugees and migrants want to leave Turkey due to poor conditions. This includes inadequate living conditions; for those that receive the ESSN, despite this vital cash transfer it is not enough to live beyond an absolute bare minimum. Legal status is insecure creating “permanent temporariness”. Over a third of Syrian children are still not in school and only Afghan children with international protection status, which the majority do not hold, have the opportunity to attend school. The only employment opportunities are informal and in low-skilled factory work where refugees report degrading treatment. The list continues. In line with previous research, this study finds that conditions in Turkey are the most influential factor that influence the onwards migration decision.

A second important factor in refugees and migrants’ decision making that was not reported as frequently in 2015 research, is that the onwards migration decision making is made to join family members that arrived in Europe (frequently in 2015). Due to the high flows in 2015, several European countries imposed restrictions on family reunification, including the temporary suspension of family reunification rights for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, making it difficult or impossible for family members to join those who had already arrived. In this research 13 individuals in transit in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were seeking to join their family members. This is an important consideration of an unintended policy implication.

An important new development from previous research is that in contrast to earlier research that suggested those who had sought to move on from Turkey did so in 2015 (Duvell, 2018), we find that since early 2016 there is an increasing population of ‘stuck’ refugees and migrants in Turkey. Two central factors that contribute to being stuck are; first, the rise in cost of smugglers due to increased external migration controls and deterrence. Second, the inability to pay such fees due to rising economic challenges in Turkey, competitiveness for informal jobs, and inflation increasing daily living costs. Thus, although the aspiration to migrate

onwards still appears high (19 of 30 respondents in Turkey), the capabilities to do so are restricted by increased smuggling costs and external control policies to deter movements.

### **To what extent do policy interventions – specifically the EU Turkey Statement- impact refugees and migrants’ decision-making regarding routes and destination choices?**

The implementation of the EU Turkey statement on 20 March 2016 led to two important considerations for refugees and migrants in Turkey. First, after a short period of time it became clear that newly arrived refugees and migrants in Greece were stuck on the islands and this information filtered back to those still in Turkey. Going by sea to Greece was thus not only a more difficult option, but it was widely perceived that conditions on the islands were significantly poorer compared to 2015. This has been reflected in changing flows which have seen an increased in detections on Turkey’s land borders in 2018.

Second, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey has had different impacts on different nationality groups. In this study, this is quite clear in that 10 of the 19 Syrians interviewed in Turkey wanted to move onwards from Turkey compared to nine of the eleven Afghan interviewees in Turkey (19 of 30 total respondents aspire to move onwards). The sample size of respondents in this study is relatively small, so clearly this interpretation needs to be taken with caution. However, the Facility for Refugees has created a two-tier system in Turkey for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees. This was reflected strongly in the interviews with Afghans who understood that they were not given the same rights and services as Syrians, but commonly did not understand why.

### **Overarching Conclusions and Implications**

Migrant decision making is multi-faceted and policies can only have a limited effect. In this report we focus on specific policies and their role in decision making, recognising that decision making is complex and influenced by multiple factors (as shown in the conceptual model outlined in Section 3 and explained further). Consistent with earlier research, this study found that the most significant factors for refugees and migrants’ decisions regarding onwards movement from Turkey continue to be: employment, legal rights, quality of life, and family reunification. All of these elements are highly influenced by the policy environment; but individual policies may have uneven impacts on the lived experience of different refugees and migrants and may carry varying weight in their individual decision making processes.

Regarding the role of the EU-Turkey Statement within these decision making processes, the Statement included policies to both strengthen support for refugees in Turkey, and to control irregular migration through the one-for-one arrangement and external migration control policies.

The EU-Turkey Statement did not have an explicit role in respondents' decision making, as few knew of the deal, and those who demonstrated some knowledge of it often gave information which diverged considerably from the Statement's stated policy intentions. At the same time, however, the EU-Turkey Statement clearly did have significant effects on decision making through its implementation of external controls which have further constrained refugees and migrants' capabilities for onwards migration. This connection was not always clear to refugees and migrants, which reflects the important policy information gap discussed in Section 4 of this report. On the whole, refugees and migrants were highly aware that the route, through the Western Balkans, was now closed and much more difficult.

The results of the research lead to three overarching conclusions and implications.

1. It is clear that the EU-Turkey Statement has had clear and notable impacts. It is undeniable that flows have decreased from the EU-Turkey Statement, considering the policy changes that began in November 2015 in Turkey with the JAP and continued until post implementation in Greece in 2016. It is uncertain, however, if this is a temporary or long-term shift. At the time of writing in 2019, arrivals from Turkey to Greece have been increasing (although clearly not to the same scale as in 2015), and, as this research clearly shows, aspirations to move onwards from Turkey are still high.

Although not the central focus of this report, there is also sufficient evidence to conclude that the EU-Turkey Statement has impacted smuggling dynamics in Turkey. This is demonstrated by: 1) the more diverse smuggling routes and prices reported by respondents as compared to the cost of the standard sea crossing to Greece in 2015, 2) the smuggling market's shift from visibility to be clandestine, and 3) by the high number of failed onwards migration attempts. It is not possible to assess, based on this research, how the EU-Turkey Statement has impacted the business model of smugglers, and further research would therefore be necessary to understand the ways that recruitment, profits, and smuggling approaches have changed.

2. The Facility for Refugees in Turkey, although an immense investment of the EU, has not greatly changed decision making among many refugees and migrants in Turkey. The central reason for this is that economic conditions in Turkey are deteriorating at a faster rate than the Facility can correct through its policies and investments. Resultantly, a policy intended to reduce vulnerability and improve conditions for refugees in Turkey is encapsulated within a system of structural insecurity and rising vulnerabilities.

A core element of the Facility is the ESSN that provides important cash assistance for the most vulnerable registered refugees (therefore excluding unregistered Afghans). A recent assessment of the ESSN by the World Food Programme (WFP), with primarily Syrian and Iraqi refugees, found that the ESSN helps to lift beneficiary households' income above the threshold of the Minimum Expenditure Basket, thus reducing their poverty levels. However, the WFP assessment also found that ESSN beneficiaries remain poorer overall than refugees deemed ineligible for the ESSN or who have not applied for the ESSN. This demonstrates that amongst Syrian and Iraqi refugees, beneficiaries of the ESSN are the poorest. While this cash assistance is urgently needed by beneficiaries for their day-to-day survival, the impact of these cash transfers on individual lives is still relatively small. It is therefore unsurprising that the evidence from respondents demonstrates that neither receiving the ESSN nor the prospect of receiving the ESSN influences decision making to stay in Turkey rather than move onwards.

In terms of the Facility's major investments in education and health, the Facility has made large investments into health and education, but refugees and migrants continue to be frustrated by the difficulties in accessing both health and education in Turkey (and in some cases by the quality of the services offered). Despite investments of the Facility into both health and education, health and education are both still cited as a driver of aspirations to leave Turkey.

The Facility has not been able to address wider issues such as refugees and migrants' legal rights and opportunities for integration into the formal labour market in Turkey. Access to Temporary and International Protection status in Turkey is increasingly restricted, and the legal rights and security that these statuses confer often fall short of respondents' expectations. It is clear that employment is a central factor driving aspirations for onwards movement, and the evidence suggests that formal employment that offers decent working conditions and wages is a factor that could potentially change decision making to stay in Turkey. Recognising that the Facility has not been able to substantially increase formal employment, this is an important area for policy consideration.

On the whole, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey is clearly an indispensable component of humanitarian aid in Turkey that protects beneficiaries against the worst immediate effects of forced displacement (for example, in terms of poverty, missed schooling and health risks). However, given respondents' strong desires for longer-term security and better socio-economic prospects, current Facility programming has not played a central role in the decision making of refugees and migrants in this study. Further research would be needed to expand the understanding of the Facility's role in refugee livelihoods and decision making in Turkey.

3. The current context – more than three years on from the initial implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement – has important differentiating elements from 2015. In 2015, it was thought that those who wanted to move onwards from Turkey were on their way or had already left Turkey. Today, the situation is different with an increasing population of refugees and migrants ‘stuck’ in Turkey and experiencing ‘involuntary immobility’. Aspirations for onwards mobility appear to still be high amongst the respondents interviewed, with 19 of the 30 respondents interviewed in Turkey aspiring to move onwards (and for many of the same reasons that motivated onwards movement prior to the EU-Turkey Statement). In particular, Afghans, most of whom do not have access to international protection or any other legal status in Turkey, aspire to move onwards. As mentioned, although aspirations for migration are still high, capabilities for onwards movement are greatly reduced, and it is unclear how many respondents will be able to actually realise their migration aspirations. The implications of having a ‘stuck’ population in Turkey - particularly in light of the shrinking access to international protection offered in Turkey - requires further reflection and consideration.





# Managementsamenvatting: Besluitvorming op de Balkanroute en de EU-Turkije verklaring

In 2015 was sprake van een toename van migratiestromen vanuit Turkije naar Griekenland en vervolgens via de Westelijke Balkan naar andere landen van de Europese Unie (EU). Deze toename leidde tot een “vluchtelingencrisis” in Europa. In reactie op deze toename is in november 2015 een gezamenlijk actieplan (JAP) ontwikkeld door de EU en Turkije om de migratiestromen een halt toe te roepen. Het resultaat van het JAP was de uitvoering van de EU-Turkije verklaring, beter bekend als de EU-Turkije deal van 20 maart 2016. De EU-Turkije verklaring was een omstreden beleid dat tot fundamentele debatten binnen de EU heeft geleid. Het doel van dit rapport is om te onderzoeken welke invloed het pakket aan maatregelen heeft gehad op de besluitvorming van vluchtelingen en migranten in Turkije en op de route van de Westelijke Balkan naar Europa tussen 2015 en 2018.

*De centrale onderzoeksvraag van deze studie is: hoe kunnen fluctuaties in migratiestromen op de Balkanroute van januari 2015 - december 2018 worden verklaard?*

Deze hoofdvraag is uitgewerkt in verschillende deelvragen:

- Welke verklaringen zijn er voor de sterke daling van het aantal vluchtelingen en migranten op de Balkanroute vlak voordat de EU-Turkije verklaring in werking trad?
- Wat zijn de belangrijkste beslisfactoren van vluchtelingen en migranten wanneer zij ervoor kiezen om Turkije te verlaten voor of na de EU-Turkije verklaring?
- In hoeverre hebben beleidsinterventies invloed op de besluitvorming van vluchtelingen en migranten met betrekking tot migratieroutes en bestemmingskeuzes?

De EU-Turkije verklaring wordt in dit rapport in brede zin opgevat, dat wil zeggen inclusief de beleidswijzigingen die hebben plaatsgevonden na de ondertekening van het JAP. Deze beleidsmaatregelen hebben betrekking op de periode november 2015 tot de post-implementatie van de EU-Turkije verklaring in maart 2016. De reden hiervoor is dat de EU-Turkije verklaring het resultaat is van het JAP, en beide beleidsinterventies erop gericht zijn om migratiestromen een halt toe te roepen. Directe maatregelen na het JAP omvatten onder andere een intensief inspectiebeleid door Turkije van stranden en van fabrieken die reddingsvesten en rubberboten produceren, alsmede nieuwe visumvereisten voor Irakezen en Syriërs voor toegang tot Turkije.

In deze studie maken we gebruik van een model gebaseerd op vier uitgangspunten:

1. De besluitvorming van migranten wordt beïnvloed door een complex van micro-, meso-, en macrofactoren, waarvan beleid er één van is.
2. Migratiebeslissingen zijn gebaseerd op percepties van beleid en op een subjectieve verwerking van informatie.

De perceptie van vluchtelingen en migranten van een bepaald beleid of een specifieke situatie kan overeenkomen met het formele beleid, maar kan daarvan ook gedeeltelijk of geheel afwijken. Beslissingen kunnen dus worden genomen op basis van percepties, die strijdig zijn met de intenties of met de daadwerkelijke uitvoering van beleid. In dit rapport hebben we ons best gedaan om percepties van beleid en het formele beleid van elkaar te onderscheiden.

3. Dit rapport heeft als doel om verschillende componenten van de EU-Turkije verklaring te onderscheiden en te laten zien hoe elk van hen van invloed is op de besluitvorming om al dan niet te migreren. Onze analyse richt zich vooral op migratie-specifiek beleid in het huidige land en in bestemmingslanden (hierbij richten ons vooral op de EU als regionale actor). Migratiespecifiek beleid heeft als oogmerk om migratieprocessen en de positie van migranten te beïnvloeden, bijvoorbeeld door striktere fysieke grensbewaking of door selectieve toegang tot de arbeidsmarkt. Natuurlijk kan ook ander beleid van invloed zijn op besluitvormingsprocessen, maar gelet op de omvangrijke hoeveelheid migratie-specifieke beleidsmaatregelen die in de periode 2015-2018 in Turkije en elders zijn geïntroduceerd, hebben we ons hiertoe beperkt.
4. De onderzochte besluitvorming van personen heeft betrekking op een eerdere beslissing die is genomen als een respondent al is gemigreerd, of betreft een plan om al dan niet verder te migreren als dat aan de orde komt tijdens het interview. Deze planvorming betekent overigens niet dat de migratie ook daadwerkelijk is gerealiseerd. Dit is onbekend omdat de interviews slechts op één moment zijn afgenomen.

De methodologie voor deze studie omvat een literatuuronderzoek, een tijdlijn reconstructie van de belangrijkste evenementen in de periode 2015-2018, en interviews met 38 belangrijke stakeholders en 96 Afghaanse en Syrische respondenten in vier landen: Bosnië en Herzegovina (32), Nederland (32), Servië (27), en Turkije (41). Deze vier landen zijn gekozen om hun verschillende functies in het migratieproces. Turkije als land dat miljoenen migranten en vluchtelingen opving en startland is voor een verdere reis naar Europa, Servië als strategisch transit-land in 2015, Bosnië en Herzegovina als een nieuw transit-land in 2017 en 2018, en Nederland als bestemmingsland.

Het aantal interviews dat is afgenomen is begrensd in het licht van de omvang van migranten uit Afghanistan en Syrië. Voor de dataverzameling is gebruik gemaakt van selectieve steekproeven om voor voldoende variëteit in cases te zorgen. Het onderzoek is daardoor niet representatief voor alle vluchtelingen en migranten die in Turkije en in Balklanden verblijven. Daarvoor zou grootschalig onderzoek nodig zijn geweest.



### **Welke verklaringen zijn er voor de sterke daling van het aantal vluchtelingen en migranten op de Balkanroute vlak voordat de verklaring EU-Turkije in werking trad?**

De tijdlijn reconstructie van dit onderzoek laat zien dat vooral de verscherpte (fysieke) grensbewaking in landen als Macedonië, Hongarije, Servië, Kroatië, Oostenrijk voorafgaand aan de EU-Turkije verklaring verantwoordelijk is geweest voor de daling van het aantal vluchtelingen en migranten.

### **Wat zijn de belangrijkste beslissingsfactoren van vluchtelingen en migranten die ervoor kiezen om Turkije verlaten voor en na de EU- Turkije Verklaring?**

De centrale doelstelling van de Faciliteit voor Vluchtelingen in Turkije is het verbeteren van de leefomstandigheden voor vluchtelingen. Deze doelstelling is deels gerealiseerd omdat initiatieven zoals de ESSN (Emergency Social Safety Net)-kaart essentieel zijn voor de dagelijkse ondersteuning van ongeveer een derde van de vluchtelingen in Turkije. Tegelijkertijd zijn hun leefomstandigheden in Turkije niet wezenlijk veranderd in vergelijking met de periode dat de Faciliteit er nog niet was. Deze studie vindt nagenoeg dezelfde resultaten als eerder onderzoek voorafgaand aan de implementatie van de EU-Turkije verklaring (Düvell, 2018; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016), namelijk dat veel vluchtelingen en migranten Turkije willen verlaten vanwege slechte leefomstandigheden. Voor degenen die ESSN ontvangen, is het vaak onvoldoende om boven het absolute bestaansminimum uit te komen. Daarbij is hun wettelijke status onzeker, omdat sprake is van “permanente tijdelijkheid”. Meer dan een derde van de Syrische kinderen zit nog niet op school en alleen Afghaanse kinderen met een internationale beschermingsstatus - die de meerderheid niet heeft - hebben de mogelijkheid om naar school te gaan. Kansen op werk zijn vooral beperkt tot slecht betaald werk in de informele economie en tot laaggeschoold fabriekswerk waar vluchtelingen te maken hebben met vernederende behandelingen. In overeenstemming met eerder onderzoek vinden we dat de leefomstandigheden in Turkije de meest bepalende factor zijn voor het nemen van een migratiebeslissing.

Een tweede belangrijke factor om verder te migreren betreft de wens om zich te voegen bij familieleden die in Europa zijn aangekomen (vaak in 2015). Dit aspect kwam in eerdere studies nog niet aan de orde. Door de grote migratiestromen in 2015 hebben verschillende Europese landen beperkingen opgelegd aan gezinshereniging waardoor het moeilijk of onmogelijk is om herenigd te worden met familieleden. In dit onderzoek wilden 13 personen die in transit verkeren in Servië en Bosnië en Herzegovina zich bij hun familieleden voegen. Het vastzitten van deze personen is een voorbeeld van een onbedoeld gevolg van beleid.

Een belangrijke nieuwe bevinding is dat sinds begin 2016 een groeiende populatie van vluchtelingen en migranten ‘vastzit’ in Turkije. In eerder onderzoek is gesuggereerd dat diegenen die Turkije wilden verlaten dat reeds in 2015 hebben gedaan (Düvell, 2018). Ons onderzoek levert een ander beeld op. Velen willen doormigreren maar zitten vast. Twee factoren spelen daarbij een rol. Ten eerste de stijging van prijzen van smokkelaars door de grotere risico's als gevolg van de verscherpte externe migratiecontrole. Ten tweede zijn veel vluchtelingen en migranten niet in staat om de hoge prijzen te betalen door de economische uitdagingen in Turkije, waaronder het verwerven van informeel werk en de toegenomen kosten van het dagelijkse levensonderhoud als gevolg van oplopende inflatie. Hoewel de wens om verder te migreren nog steeds hoog lijkt - 19 van de 30 respondenten in Turkije maken hier melding van - zijn de mogelijkheden om migratieaspiraties daadwerkelijk te realiseren beperkt.

### **In hoeverre hebben beleidsinterventies - in het bijzonder de EU-Turkije verklaring - invloed op de besluitvorming van vluchtelingen en migranten met betrekking tot routes en bestemmingskeuzes?**

De uitvoering van de EU-Turkije verklaring van maart 2016 heeft twee belangrijke implicaties gehad voor vluchtelingen en migranten in Turkije. Ten eerste werd snel duidelijk dat nieuw aangekomen vluchtelingen en migranten in Griekenland vast zaten op de eilanden in slechte leefomstandigheden. Deze informatie werd teruggekoppeld naar personen in Turkije. Een reis over zee werd niet alleen een moeilijkere optie door de aangescherpte migratiecontrole, maar ook de omstandigheden op de eilanden waren aanzienlijk slechter dan in 2015. Daardoor veranderden migratiestromen van richting, zoals blijkt uit de toename van het aantal aanhoudingen aan de landgrenzen van Turkije in 2018.

Ten tweede heeft de Faciliteit voor Vluchtelingen een duaal systeem voor Syrische en niet-Syrische vluchtelingen in het leven geroepen. Voor niet-Syriërs geldt dat zij geen of veel minder toegang hebben tot dit EU-programma. Dit heeft gevolgen voor de migratieaspiraties van onderscheiden migrantengroepen. Nagenoeg alle Afghaanse geïnterviewden wilden door migreren (9 van de 11), tegenover 10 van de 19 geïnterviewde Syriërs. Het gaat om kleine aantallen geïnterviewden, maar de verschillen in rechtspositie lijken tot gevolg te hebben dat naar verhouding meer Afghanen verder willen migreren dan Syriërs. Veel Afghaanse geïnterviewden begrijpen daarbij niet waarom zij niet dezelfde rechten en diensten krijgen als Syriërs.

### **Overkoepelende conclusies en beleidsimplicaties**

De besluitvorming door migranten is een veelzijdig proces en het beleid heeft daarop een zeker effect. Dit rapport richt zich op specifiek migratiebeleid en de rol daarvan in de

besluitvorming van vluchtelingen en migranten om al dan niet verder te migreren. Daarbij onderkennen we dat meerdere factoren van invloed zijn op de besluitvorming (zie het conceptuele model in paragraaf 3). In lijn met eerder onderzoek blijkt uit deze studie dat de besluitvorming van vluchtelingen en migranten om al dan niet door te migreren vooral bepaald wordt door: werkgelegenheid, wettelijke rechten, kwaliteit van leven en mogelijkheden tot gezinshereniging. Al deze elementen worden nadrukkelijk beïnvloed door de beleidsomgeving, maar specifieke beleidsmaatregelen kunnen een ongelijke impact hebben op de alledaagse ervaringen van verschillende vluchtelingen en migranten. Ze kunnen ook een wisselend gewicht in de schaal leggen bij het maken van individuele migratiebeslissingen.

De EU-Turkije verklaring bevatte beleidsmaatregelen om zowel vluchtelingen in Turkije beter te ondersteunen als om illegale migratie te beheersen via de één-op-één-regeling en het externe migratiecontrolebeleid. Ons onderzoek laat zien dat EU-Turkije verklaring geen expliciete rol speelde bij de besluitvorming van de respondenten, omdat slechts weinigen ervan op de hoogte waren, en degenen die er enige weet van hadden, gaven vaak informatie die substantieel afweek van de beleidsintenties van de verklaring. Tegelijkertijd heeft de verklaring EU-Turkije aanzienlijke gevolgen gehad voor migratiebesluitvorming. Zo heeft de uitvoering van externe controles de mogelijkheden van vluchtelingen en migranten om verder te migreren sterk ingeperkt. Het verband tussen de EU-Turkije verklaring en verscherpte externe controles was niet altijd duidelijk voor de respondenten in deze studie. Deze bevinding weerspiegelt de informatiekloof die er bestaat tussen de wereld van het beleid en de wereld van vluchtelingen en migranten (zie paragraaf 4). Maar over het algemeen waren vluchtelingen en migranten zich er terdege van bewust dat de route door de Westelijke Balkan gesloten was en daardoor heel moeilijk was geworden.

De resultaten van het onderzoek leiden tot drie overkoepelende conclusies.

1. Ten eerste heeft de EU-Turkije verklaring waarneembare gevolgen gehad voor de omvang van migratiestromen. Ze zijn gedaald onder invloed van de beleidsveranderingen die vanaf november 2015 in Turkije zijn begonnen met het JAP en die zijn doorgegaan tot na de implementatie van EU-Turkije verklaring in Griekenland in 2016. Het is onzeker of sprake is van een tijdelijke dan wel van een lange termijn verschuiving. Op het moment van schrijven in 2019 is het aantal aankomsten vanuit Turkije naar Griekenland weer aan het toenemen (maar niet op dezelfde schaal als in 2015). Ook laat het onderzoek zien dat veel vluchtelingen en migranten de aspiratie hebben om verder te migreren vanuit Turkije. Hoewel het niet centraal staat in dit rapport, zijn er ook voldoende aanwijzingen om te concluderen dat de

EU-Turkije verklaring de dynamiek van de smokkelmarkt in Turkije heeft beïnvloed. Dat blijkt uit: 1) het bestaan van meer diverse smokkelroutes en prijzen die door de respondenten worden gerapporteerd in vergelijking met de kosten van de standaard zeevaartreis naar Griekenland in 2015; 2) de verschuiving van een zichtbare smokkelmarkt naar een meer ondergrondse, clandestiene markt, en 3) het hoge aantal mislukte migratiepogingen. Het is niet echter mogelijk om op basis van dit onderzoek te beoordelen hoe de EU-Turkije verklaring het bedrijfsmodel van smokkelaars precies heeft beïnvloed. Er is verder onderzoek nodig om te begrijpen hoe patronen van werving, winsten en smokkelstrategieën zijn veranderd.

2. Ten tweede is de Faciliteit voor Vluchtelingen een immense investering van de EU die als oogmerk heeft om migratie te ontmoedigen en de positie van vluchtelingen te versterken. Toch zien we dat de Faciliteit voor Vluchtelingen de aspiraties van migranten om te migreren niet wezenlijk heeft veranderd. De belangrijkste reden hiervoor is dat de omstandigheden in Turkije sneller verslechteren dan de Faciliteit via haar beleid en investeringen kan corrigeren. Het gevolg is dat een beleid gericht op het verminderen van kwetsbaarheid en het verbeteren van de leefomstandigheden voor vluchtelingen en migranten in Turkije, nu is ingebed in een context van toenemende kwetsbaarheden.

Een centrale voorziening van de Faciliteit is ESSN dat belangrijke financiële steun biedt aan de meest kwetsbare geregistreerde vluchtelingen (ongeregistreerde Afghanen zijn daarvan uitgesloten). Een recente evaluatie van ESSN door het Wereldvoedselprogramma (WFP), vooral gericht op Syrische en Iraakse vluchtelingen, wees uit dat ESSN helpt om het inkomen van huishoudens die er voor in aanmerking komen boven de armoedegrens van het Minimum Expenditure Basket te laten uitkomen. Uit deze evaluatie studie bleek echter ook dat begunstigden over het algemeen armer blijven dan geregistreerde vluchtelingen die er niet voor in aanmerking komen of die zich niet hebben aangemeld voor het ESSN. Dit wijst uit dat onder Syrische en Iraakse vluchtelingen de begunstigden van ESSN het armst zijn. Hoewel deze financiële steun dringend nodig is voor de dagelijkse overleving, is de impact van deze geldoverdrachten op individuele levens relatief gering. Het is daarom niet verwonderlijk dat uit de interviews met respondenten naar voren komt dat noch het ontvangen van ESSN, noch het vooruitzicht op het ontvangen van ESSN, invloed heeft op de besluitvorming om al dan niet in Turkije te blijven of door te migreren. De Faciliteit heeft grote investeringen gedaan in onderwijs en gezondheidszorg, maar vluchtelingen en migranten blijven gefrustreerd door de moeilijkheden om er in Turkije toegang toe te krijgen (en in sommige gevallen door de kwaliteit van de aangeboden

diensten). Ondanks investeringen van de Faciliteit in zowel gezondheidszorg als onderwijs, worden gezondheidszorg en onderwijs nog steeds genoemd als een drijfveer voor aspiraties om Turkije te verlaten.

De Faciliteit is niet in staat geweest om bredere kwesties aan te pakken, zoals de wettelijke rechten van vluchtelingen en migranten en mogelijkheden voor integratie op de formele arbeidsmarkt. De toegang tot Temporary and International Protection Status in Turkije is steeds meer ingeperkt. Ook de wettelijke rechten en veiligheid die deze statussen verlenen, voldoen onvoldoende aan verwachtingen van de respondenten. Het is duidelijk dat werkgelegenheid een centrale factor is die van invloed is op aspiraties voor verdere migratie. Er zijn ook aanwijzingen dat formele werkgelegenheid die goede arbeidsvoorwaarden en lonen biedt, een belangrijke factor kan zijn om in Turkije te blijven. Het feit dat de Faciliteit de formele werkgelegenheid niet substantieel heeft kunnen vergroten, is daarom een belangrijk thema voor nadere beleidsanalyse. De Faciliteit voor Vluchtelingen in Turkije is een onmisbaar onderdeel van humanitaire hulp in Turkije dat begunstigden beschermt tegen de ergste directe gevolgen van gedwongen verplaatsing (bijvoorbeeld in termen van armoede, gemiste scholing en gezondheidsrisico's). Gegeven de sterke verlangens van de respondenten naar veiligheid op langere termijn en betere sociaal-economische vooruitzichten, speelt de Faciliteit geen grote rol in de besluitvorming door vluchtelingen en migranten in deze studie. Verder onderzoek is nodig om meer inzicht te krijgen in de rol van de Faciliteit voor het levensonderhoud en besluitvorming van vluchtelingen en migranten in Turkije.

3. Ten derde wijkt de huidige situatie - meer dan drie jaar na de uitvoering van de EU-Turkije verklaring - sterk af van de situatie in 2015. In 2015 werd verondersteld dat vluchtelingen en migranten die vanuit Turkije verder wilden migreren, dit gingen doen of al hadden gedaan. De huidige situatie laat echter een groeiende populatie vluchtelingen en migranten zien die 'vastzitten' in Turkije en die 'onvrijwillige immobiliteit' ervaren. De aspiraties voor verdere mobiliteit lijken nog steeds hoog te zijn onder de geïnterviewde respondenten, waarbij 19 van de 30 geïnterviewde respondenten in Turkije de aspiratie hebben door te migreren. De redenen voor verdere migratie zijn gelijk aan de beweegredenen in de periode voorafgaand aan de EU-Turkije verklaring. Vooral Afghanen, van wie de meesten geen toegang hebben tot internationale bescherming of enige andere wettelijke status in Turkije, streven ernaar verder te migreren. Hoewel de ambities voor migratie nog steeds hoog zijn, zijn de mogelijkheden voor verdere migratie sterk verminderd, en het is onduidelijk hoeveel respondenten hun migratieaspiraties daadwerkelijk kunnen realiseren. De sociale en economische gevolgen van het hebben van een 'vastzittende' bevolking in Turkije is een vraagstuk dat om nadere aandacht vraagt.





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