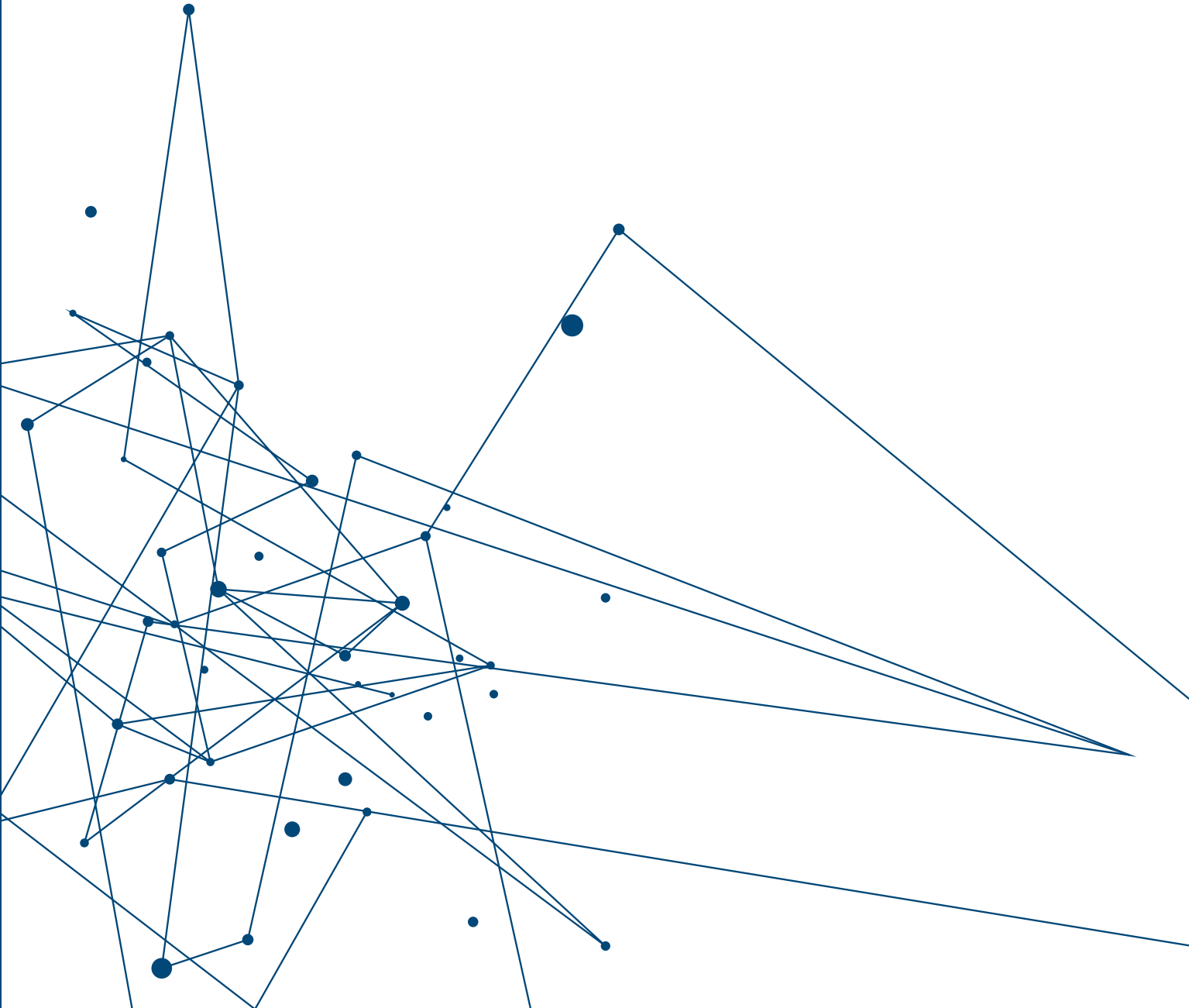


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# The UNDP's Proposal for a 'Türkiye Compact' Is it Politically Feasible?

*Kemal Kirişci and Friedrich Püttmann*



The legacy of the 2015 refugee crisis still affects migration policy across Europe, as reflected in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, recent national policy initiatives and election results in various EU member states. In response to this need to develop more sustainable migration and refugee policies, this policy brief formulates recommendations on how the United Nations Development Programme's proposal for a *Türkiye Compact* could contribute to addressing this challenge and offer long-term solutions for Turkey, its Syrian refugees and the EU. Despite all obstacles, the *Türkiye Compact* has the potential to also become a general model for future cooperation on migration and refugees between the Global North and Global South.

This policy brief is based on the CATS Network project "The Political Feasibility of the Adoption of the UNDP's Türkiye Compact by the EU, the UK and Switzerland", conducted by Contemporary Turkish Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) from December 2023 to December 2024.

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# What is the ‘Türkiye Compact’ about?

The Türkiye Compact (TC)<sup>1</sup> is a policy proposal inspired by the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)<sup>2</sup> that was endorsed by all EU member states except Hungary. An econometric study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) underlying this proposal shows that if the EU extended full preferential market access to Turkish agricultural products thus far not included in the EU-Turkey Customs Union, and if the United States together with Canada did the same for Turkish textiles, this would create 284,000 new formal jobs in Turkey.<sup>3</sup> In return, Turkey would facilitate access to formal employment for Syrian refugees in Turkey. The UNDP’s study also shows that an estimated additional 52,000 jobs would result from secondary production and consumption, which would be accompanied by significant increases in tax and social security revenues. Overall, the TC would thereby contribute an additional 0.82 per cent to Turkey’s overall GDP. This is notable considering that the damage caused by the 2023 earthquake amounted to approximately 2 per cent of Turkey’s GDP.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of the TC is to improve refugees’ economic self-reliance and foster social cohesion with host communities while also alleviating some of the strain on the EU’s humanitarian funding. As such, the TC proposal neatly reflects the whole-of-society approach anchored in the Global Compact on Refugees, benefitting both refugees and host communities. What renders the TC an innovative approach is that previous

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Türkiye Compact Policy Brief: Feasibility Study for Türkiye Compact. Stimulating Economic Growth and Employment of Refugees and Host Communities in Türkiye through International Preferential Trade* (19 October 2022a), <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-10/UNDP%20Feasibility%20Study%20for%20Tu%CC%88rkiye%20Compact%20English%20Policy%20Brief%20Final.pdf> (accessed 26 November 2024)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (UN), *Global Compact on Refugees* (New York, 2018), <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet> (accessed 26 November 2024)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Feasibility Study for Türkiye Compact. Stimulating Economic Growth and Employment of Refugees and Host Communities in Türkiye through International Preferential Trade* (19 October 2022b), [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp\\_feasibility\\_study\\_for\\_turkiye\\_compact.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-06/undp_feasibility_study_for_turkiye_compact.pdf) (accessed 26 November 2024)

<sup>4</sup> “Ekonomistler Kahramanmaraş depreminin mali boyutunu yorumladı” [Economists commented on the financial dimension of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake], *Cumhuriyet* (online), 10 February 2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/gundemdeprem-bolgesinin-ekonomik-gostergeleri-2050493> (accessed 26 November 2024); Nevzat Devranoğlu and Orhan Coşkun, “Earthquakes to disrupt Turkey's growth, stretch budget as Erdogan heads to elections”, *Reuters* (online), 08 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/earthquakes-disrupt-turkeys-growth-stretch-budget-erdogan-heads-elections-2023-02-08/> (accessed 29 November 2024)

projects, mostly funded by the EU, which aspired to improve Syrian refugees' employability through Turkish language lessons and vocational training did not generate sustainable jobs. This is highlighted by the UNDP's study, which estimated that, from 2017 to 2024, such projects had created at most 66,000 jobs.<sup>5</sup> This poor performance has been criticized by the EU's Court of Auditors on the grounds that "providing training does not generate value for money if the vast majority of participants subsequently remain unemployed."<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the TC recognises that "firms are not charities" and that it is unrealistic to expect them to act based on purely philanthropic motivations.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it highlights the need to shift the focus from the supply side to the demand side of Turkey's labour market. This is done by advocating for trade preferences that lead to greater commercial incentives for firms to embark on the formal employment of refugees.

However, the *political* feasibility of the TC remains uncertain, largely due to the unclear political will of Turkey's international partners to implement the proposal. In response, this policy brief seeks to identify the key political factors and actors shaping the prospects of the TC's adoption by the EU, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. In doing so, the brief focuses particularly on Germany, a major trading partner of Turkey and a key EU member state in EU-Turkey relations.

To gain insight into this political landscape, we conducted and analysed 50 interviews between February and November 2024 with policymakers from different political parties, government officials, international organisations, think tanks and third-sector experts in Ankara, Istanbul, Brussels, Geneva, Berlin, London and Bern, which lay the foundation for our findings. A detailed list of the organisations and institutions to which our interviewees are affiliated is provided in the project's forthcoming full report.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (19 October 2022b): 18

<sup>6</sup> European Court of Auditors, *The Facility for Refugees in Turkey – Beneficial for refugees and host communities, but impact and sustainability not yet ensured*, Special report 06/2024, Paragraph 106, 23 April 2024, <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-06> (accessed 26 November 2024)

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (London: Allen Lane, 2017):

# A Brief Overview: The Situation of Refugees Worldwide and in Turkey

As of 2023, 43.4 million refugees worldwide were under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>8</sup> Most of these refugees are hosted in countries of the Global South and remain in protracted situations without access to durable solutions, such as voluntary return, resettlement or local integration. The root causes of displacement remain unresolved, and countries in the Global North are enacting increasingly restrictive policies towards asylum seekers. Resettlement efforts fall short with only 427,700 refugees resettled yearly on average, and local integration in the form of naturalization benefitting only about 45,410 refugees annually between 2019 and 2023. Furthermore, the average number of annual refugee returns was less than 682,000 during this period.<sup>9</sup>

In the absence of durable solutions, refugees increasingly face precarity and dependence on humanitarian assistance, which is costly to many donor countries in the Global North, including the EU. The 2024 Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) estimated a financial need of \$48.65 billion to aid 186.5 million people across 71 countries, but only 25 per cent of this amount (\$12.26 billion) was raised.<sup>10</sup> This exacerbates the gap between shrinking available funding amidst donor fatigue, and growing needs compounded by multiplying crises.<sup>11</sup>

The 1951 Refugee Convention grants refugees the right to work; however, only few countries in the Global South allow refugees formal access to the labour market due to bureaucratic obstacles and high unemployment rates of local populations.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2023* (Copenhagen, 13 June 2023): 15 ff., <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends> (accessed: 22 October 2024)

<sup>9</sup> Figures calculated from table entitled “Durable solutions for refugees: 2019–2023, Ibid, 40  
For resettlement targets calculated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Projected Global Resettlement Needs* (Geneva, 2025), <https://tinyurl.com/2snzwrdf> (accessed 22 October 2024)

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024 Monthly Updates. June – July* (07 August 2024), <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-monthly-updates/article/june-and-july-update#page-title> (accessed 22 October 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce, “Despite Wars, Earthquakes and Hurricanes, U.N. Cuts Appeal for Aid”, *New York Times* (online), 11 December 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/11/world/europe/united-nations-humanitarian-aid-appeal.html> (accessed 29 November 2024)

Consequently, many refugees are drawn into informal employment, exposing them to exploitation and increasing tensions with host communities, who fear that refugees drive down wages and undermine their access to jobs. This can cause the refugees to move on.

Turkey provides an illustrative example of these challenges as the country hosting the largest number of refugees worldwide, with currently 3.1 million Syrian refugees and another more than 195,000 individuals under international protection.<sup>12</sup> Syrian refugees increasingly find themselves in protracted situations, and there has been a dramatic rise in anti-refugee sentiment among the Turkish public, fuelling an already-growing secondary migration of Syrians towards the EU.<sup>13</sup> In 2014, the Turkish government did grant temporary protection status to Syrian refugees, giving them access to free public services like healthcare and education. However, the 2023 earthquake, coupled with persistent economic difficulties driven by high inflation, worsened conditions for both refugees and the local population. Despite legislation allowing refugees to obtain official work permits, most work informally – alongside many Turkish citizens. Meanwhile, the EU continues to face high costs for its humanitarian assistance to Turkey.

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR), *Türkiye Fact Sheet* (September 2024), <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2024/10/bi-annual-fact-sheet-2024-09-turkiye.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2024)

<sup>13</sup> This trend is reflected in EU statistics, see European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), “EU received over 1.1 million asylum applications in 2023”, Press release (Malta, 28 February 2024), <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/eu-received-over-1-million-asylum-applications-2023#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20EU%2B%20countries%20received,reaching%20a%207%2Dyear%20high> (accessed 29 November 2024); European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Syrians applications for asylum in the EU+* (Malta, 21 February 2024), <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16693114/> (accessed 29 November 2024); This trend is also reflected in illegal border crossings reported by the EU’s border control agency FRONTEX. In 2023 such crossings by Syrian nationals stood at 28% constituting by far the largest group, see FRONTEX, *Annual Brief 2023* (Warsaw, 05 January 2024), [https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/Annual\\_Brief\\_2023.pdf](https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/Annual_Brief_2023.pdf) (accessed 22 October 2024)

# A Developmental Approach is Needed

European governments are focused on minimising irregular migration to the EU. To do so, migration agreements with third countries, like the EU-Turkey Statement, have become popular. However, European stakeholders increasingly stress the need to make such agreements sustainable. This requires greater consideration for the receiving societies in the partner countries,<sup>14</sup> which the TC adopts with its emphasis on the self-reliance of refugees as well as the resilience of receiving communities.

Across our interviews, there was a consensus that the EU must transition from purely humanitarian assistance to a more developmental approach regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey, improving their economic inclusion rather than relying on short-term support. This perspective was shared by EU officials and political leaders, who emphasised that the current system of providing basic assistance offers neither dignity nor long-term solutions for refugees. The TC embodies this developmental logic, promoting a more sustainable and integrated management of migration. This aligns with the EU's broader goals of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, recognising the need for a multi-faceted approach to refugee support.

The feasibility of the TC hinges on political will; technically, there are no legal obstacles arising from trade law, as our interviews confirmed. Pathways proposed by the TC include obtaining a waiver from the World Trade Organisation (WTO), or leveraging the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) for trade privileges – a policy intended to support developing countries. Furthermore, regional and bi-lateral preferential trade agreements are permissible under WTO rules.<sup>15</sup> The customs union between the EU and Turkey is a typical example. Moreover, there is also a bilateral agreement between the EU and Turkey governing trade in agricultural products that extends unilateral tariff benefits to Turkey beyond the tariff applicable to the exports of third countries.<sup>16</sup> This existing arrangement offers a possible template for the EU to remove tariffs and quotas on agricultural exports from Turkey, thereby permitting the adoption of the TC without undermining the WTO's existing trade laws. Such a policy

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<sup>14</sup> Sinem Adar and Friedrich Püttmann, *Making EU-Turkey Cooperation on Migration Sustainable*, SWP Comment 07/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], February 2022), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C07/> (accessed 2 December 2024)

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (19 October 2022b): 29–31

<sup>16</sup> Official Journal of the European Communities, *Decision No 1/98 of the EC-Turkey Association Council on the trade regime for agricultural products (98/223/EC)*, L 86/1 (Brussels, 20 March 1998) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:1998:086:FULL> (accessed 26 November 2024)

would resemble that of the “autonomous trade measure” adopted for tariff-free imports from Ukraine in 2022.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it would converge with existing European Commission proposals that advocate for combining policy areas such as trade with migration management.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the TC may also bolster the EU’s strife for better relations with Turkey. The European Council’s conclusions from October 2020<sup>19</sup> and April 2024<sup>20</sup> call for “a positive EU-Turkey agenda” and “a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship” respectively, focused on modernising the Customs Union, enhancing trade, and fostering cooperation on migration. The agenda – subject to the Cyprus issue being settled, as reaffirmed in 2024 – includes high-level dialogues concerning various sectors and recommendations to support refugees in Turkey, reflecting the EU’s interests in migration policy. While EU-Turkey relations only began to improve in practice in 2023, our interviews revealed a strong desire for better relations with Turkey, especially in Germany, covering topics from cooperation regarding economic matters to migration management. In this context, the TC could serve as a transitional arrangement towards a modernised Customs Union, reinforcing mutually beneficial ties between the EU and Turkey.

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<sup>17</sup> Official Journal of the European Union, *Regulation (EU) 2022/870 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2022 on temporary trade-liberalisation measures supplementing trade concessions applicable to Ukrainian products under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part*, L 152/103 (Brussels, 30 May 2022), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/870> (accessed 26 November 2024)

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Investment Bank on establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*, COM(2016) 385 final, (Strasbourg, 07 June 2016): 9, 17, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs\\_autres\\_institutions/commission\\_europeenne/com/2016/0385/COM\\_COM\(2016\)0385\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs_autres_institutions/commission_europeenne/com/2016/0385/COM_COM(2016)0385_EN.pdf) (accessed 24 November 2024)

<sup>19</sup> European Council, *European Council conclusions on external relations, 1 October 2020* (Brussels, 01 October 2020) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/01/european-council-conclusions-on-external-relations-1-october-2020/> (accessed 24 November 2024)

<sup>20</sup> General Secretariat of the Council, *Special meeting of the European Council (17 and 18 April 2024) – Conclusions* (Brussels, 18 April 2024) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/m5j1weop/euco-conclusions-20240417-18-en.pdf> (accessed 24 November 2024)



# Political Challenges to the Türkiye Compact

Across our interviews, we encountered a generally high level of interest - at times even enthusiasm - in the TC and its innovativeness, particularly among interlocutors working directly in migration policy. This response transcended national identities and political orientations amongst our interlocutors. However, as our interviews also reflected, an adoption of the TC would likely face multiple major political challenges.

## Resistance of EU Farmers

The prospect of the TC being adopted faces significant challenges in the EU, primarily due to potential impacts on European farmers who may oppose any policy that threatens their livelihoods. The political climate is already fraught in light of multiple farmer protests in Germany and France against EU agricultural regulations or *The Southern Common Market* (MERCOSUR)<sup>21</sup> as well as in Poland and Slovakia against tariff-free imports of agricultural products from Ukraine.

Critics argue that the TC's economic feasibility studies overlook its negative effects on European jobs, as any increase in agricultural imports from Turkey could exacerbate competition for local farmers. While the TC aims to address human rights and irregular migration issues by supporting Syrian refugees in Turkey, it risks simultaneously creating tension between migration and agricultural policies. Southern EU member states, concerned about both irregular migration and the impact of cheaper Turkish imports on their agriculture, may resist the Compact. The political ramifications could lead to its stagnation, with policymakers hesitant to support a proposal seen as politically costly.

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<sup>21</sup> Christina Lu, "Europe's Farmer Protests Are Part of a Bigger Problem", *Foreign Policy* (online), 20 February 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/20/europe-farmers-protests-climate-eu-green-deal/> (accessed 24 November 2024); "Les agriculteurs élèvent leur voix contre l'accord de libre-échange UE-Mercosur," *Dhnet* (online), 29 October 2024, [https://www.dhnet.be/dernieres-depeches/2024/10/29/les-agriculteurs-elevent-leur-voix-contre-laccord-de-libre-echange-ue-mercotur-WQW4TQOUWFA5NECI46VHFS7KUQ/#:~:text=Les%20agriculteurs%20de%20la%20F%C3%A9d%C3%A9ration,Uruguay\)%20mardi%20dans%20un%20communiqu%C3%A9](https://www.dhnet.be/dernieres-depeches/2024/10/29/les-agriculteurs-elevent-leur-voix-contre-laccord-de-libre-echange-ue-mercotur-WQW4TQOUWFA5NECI46VHFS7KUQ/#:~:text=Les%20agriculteurs%20de%20la%20F%C3%A9d%C3%A9ration,Uruguay)%20mardi%20dans%20un%20communiqu%C3%A9) (accessed 24 November 2024)

# Ankara's Position on and Reservations about the Türkiye Compact

Several of our European interviewees viewed the TC as a potential modernisation of the Customs Union “through the backdoor” and therefore raised concerns that various EU member states could be opposed to it, given ongoing political issues with this modernisation. At the same time, other interviewees were concerned that Turkey could view the TC as undermining the need for a modernised Customs Union and therefore oppose the TC, too.

One key issue across our interviews concerned the question of Turkey's own willingness to implement the TC. Interviewees expressed scepticism about Turkey's commitment to long-term integration of Syrian refugees, noting a shift in discourse towards repatriation. The Turkish political opposition's appeal to anti-refugee sentiment during elections raised doubts among interviewees about the viability of policies supporting local economic inclusion of refugees. EU officials also recognised Turkey's recent push for returns but questioned the practicality of this approach given ongoing conflicts and instability in Syria. Moreover, many of our interviewees viewed the Turkish government sceptically and flagged trust issues as a hindrance to cooperation. Overall, interviewees agreed that EU and international organisations would not pursue the TC further without explicit Turkish interest, emphasising that any successful initiative should originate from Turkey to ensure ownership and congruence with national policy.

## Political Opposition to Issue-Linkage and Doubts about the TC's Effectiveness

As discussed, the TC links migration and trade policy to enhance cooperation on irregular migration, aligning with the EU's external migration strategy. However, this approach faces criticism, particularly in Germany: that the use of development aid to serve migration-related goals may undermine the EU's credibility on human rights. Another concern several interviewees expressed was that the TC could weaken the framework for cooperation of the EU-Turkey Statement, even though they are separate and could complement each other. Their reasoning is that any new agreement between Turkey and the EU on refugees could question the validity of the EU-Turkey Statement. As one EU official put it to us: “The Statement is like a holy cow in Brussels, so anything that might look like it could change it immediately faces

opposition.”<sup>22</sup>

While the TC aims to enhance refugee self-reliance through sustainable employment, some interviewees also feared it may not be effective: sceptics argue that more affluent refugees are usually those more likely to embark on secondary movements. Therefore, doubts were expressed about the validity of the claim that the TC may discourage refugees from such secondary movements, questioning whether it justifies its political costs.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview took place in Brussels in May 2024.

# Conclusions

As becomes clear from the above, the chances of the EU, the UK and Switzerland adopting the UNDP's Türkiye Compact are fairly slim. However, based on our findings, we propose the following five recommendations as to how the political feasibility of the TC may be enhanced.

## Clarifying Turkey's Position on the TC

The Turkish government's stance on the TC reflects scepticism, marked by concerns that formal employment could allow refugees to become further settled – contrary to the public's wishes.<sup>23</sup> However, Turkey did once energetically advocate for the idea of preferential trade arrangements to enhance refugees' self-reliance and support for host societies. In fact, as also our interviews confirmed, Turkey even inserted the idea into the GCR and actively contributed to its preparation.<sup>24</sup> Although current political sentiment in the country is very much in favour of the repatriation of the refugees, there is also widespread recognition, including among the public, that this may not be feasible given the prevailing situation in Syria. Furthermore, considering the dire state of the Turkish economy, Turkish officials might well be favourably disposed to the TC's job creation and economic growth potential.

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<sup>23</sup> The Syrians Barometer survey reports show since 2017 more than 70% of respondents have supported the statement “none of them should be given citizenship”, Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2022: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye*, Executive Summary (Ankara: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], November 2023): 19, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2024/07/SB-2022-Executive-Summary-2.pdf> (accessed 24 November 2024)

<sup>24</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Compact on Refugees Fifth Formal Consultation Meeting 12-13 June 2018 Statement by Turkey, agenda item three* (June 2018): 1, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/statement-turkey-fifth-formal-consultation-agenda-item-three> (accessed 24 November 2024); Twenty two such Statements were identified submitted to the meetings during the drafting of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), [https://www.unhcr.org/search?search=Turkey&sm\\_publication\\_media%5b%5d=Speeches%20and%20statements&sm\\_tags%5b%5d=state&tags\\_op=AND&sm\\_site\\_name%5b%5d=Global%20site](https://www.unhcr.org/search?search=Turkey&sm_publication_media%5b%5d=Speeches%20and%20statements&sm_tags%5b%5d=state&tags_op=AND&sm_site_name%5b%5d=Global%20site) (accessed 24 November 2024); For Turkey's activism see “Situation analysis” in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Focus Türkiye*, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/t%C3%BCrkiye#toc-narratives> (accessed 24 November 2024)

## **Specifying the Precise Agricultural Products Turkey Would Export to the EU**

While the TC would likely face opposition from European farmers, EU quotas on Turkish agricultural products, in fact, already fluctuate based on seasonal production and the specific needs of EU member states. To reduce political resistance, the TC could be redesigned so as to limit tariff removals to Turkish products with minimal competition in the EU and high Syrian refugee employment. This approach could balance the interests of European farmers, create jobs in Turkey and support EU migration policy goals. It would entail an incremental process towards the full adoption of the TC over time, as reciprocal confidence builds and benefits of the TC manifest themselves.

## **Crafting a Policy Narrative That Clearly Communicates the Benefits for All Sides**

Policymakers need to manage both problems and their public perceptions. For the TC to succeed, an effective narrative is therefore required; one that addresses concerns from European farmers, avoids appearing as EU capitulation to Turkey and highlights the balance between migration control and humanitarian values. It must simultaneously underline the benefits for the Turkish host society and its economy, while allaying fears that such employment would automatically result in Syrians settling permanently. Whether this would best be achieved through one common narrative for all or through differentiated narratives for Turkey, the EU, the UK and Switzerland respectively is up for discussion.

## **Convincing the United States to Take Part in the TC**

Much more than the EU, convincing the US to adopt the TC is crucial to its success, as it is the US that could create 190,000 jobs by removing tariffs on Turkish textile exports. Such US support would align with American refugee and post-earthquake commitments to Turkey. Furthermore, in the case of the US, the TC has a commercial logic because Turkey is the third largest importer of US cotton. Adoption of the TC would therefore create jobs both in Turkey and the US and, as a result, may face less political opposition than in the EU.<sup>25</sup> Crucially, the US would also be a key part of building an international coalition, together with relevant UN agencies, to advocate for the TC vis-à-vis the EU and Turkey.

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<sup>25</sup> Alper Coşkun and Kemal Kirişçi, *Can Syrian Refugees Help Improve Türkiye-U.S. Relations? Giving UNDP's Türkiye Compact a Chance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 05 December 2023) <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/12/can-syrian-refugees-help-improve-turkiye-us-relations-giving-undps-turkiye-compact-a-chance?lang=en> (accessed 24 November 2024)

## Ensuring that Some of the Newly Created Jobs Really Go to the Syrian Refugees

A major risk of the TC is that job creation for Syrian refugees may not meet expectations, as seen in the EU-Jordan Compact that failed to deliver. To ensure that Syrian refugees do benefit, the TC may need to include a monitoring system responsible for ensuring that Turkish companies that enjoy tariff-free market access to the EU do uphold their commitments to employing Syrian refugees, in line with ILO and Turkish legal standards. An effective monitoring and certification system in Turkey would therefore be crucial to the TC's success and its potential future expansion after an initial small-scale test phase. Such a monitoring system would not be unusual, as the customs union has an elaborate system based on government agencies and chamber of industries that ensures that Turkish industrial products meet EU standards.

## The Way Forward: Testing a 'Small TC'

While our interviewees expressed scepticism about the priority the TC would receive amidst other global crises, the TC could, in fact, help stabilize the EU's neighbourhood, thereby preventing policymakers from facing yet another potential displacement crisis.

Based on our research, we find that the most realistic way forward for the TC would be to "start small" with a more limited list of agricultural produce that Turkey would export tariff-free to the EU, rather than the comprehensive list foreseen by the UNDP's proposal. This test version could emerge from a diplomatic process initiated by Turkey and involving the European Commission, which has the exclusive mandate to negotiate trade agreements and propose them to the European Council and Parliament for approval.

A successful conclusion and implementation of a "small TC" could then open the way to two further developments. First, it could constitute a "pilot" model for engaging the US in the adoption of the TC. Second, success with the US could, in turn, generate a synergy with the EU and make it consider expanding the "small TC" to cover more agricultural products. This iterative process could become a virtuous cycle and bring on board other countries such as Canada (already mentioned in the TC) as well as Japan, South Korea and Australia, which are all traditional donor countries of humanitarian programmes for refugees around the world. Eventually, the success of the TC could then become a tested model for similar situations around the world.

# Abbreviations

GCR	<i>Global Compact on Refugees</i>
GHO	<i>Global Humanitarian Overview</i>
GSP	<i>Generalised System of Preferences</i>
MERCOSUR	<i>Southern Common Market</i>
TC	<i>Türkiye Compact</i>
UNDP	<i>United Nations Development Programme</i>
UNHCR	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>
WTO	<i>World Trade Organisation</i>

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