

# TÜRKIYE: A major hub where migrant waves and gender gaps collide



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Türkiye is simultaneously a country of emigration, immigration, transit and large-scale refugee movement, creating overlapping mobility pathways for women. Women's migration patterns are shaped by low female labour force participation (31.8 per cent, in 2025<sup>1</sup>), patriarchal norms, unpaid care responsibilities, and uneven ability to exercise rights and access services. These factors limit women's access to stable employment and economic opportunities in the country, influencing women's mobility decisions.

**Emigration is growing and increasingly differentiated.** Türkiye's emigrants almost doubled between 1990 and 2024, from 1.8 million to 3.1 million,<sup>2</sup> with women and men broadly balanced. Women emigrants concentrate in younger working ages (notably 25–34),<sup>3</sup> and around one in five female emigrants leaving the country is under the age of 14, signalling the continued importance of family mobility and the need for comprehensive child-support services in destination contexts. Research suggests that the primary motivation for women's emigration, particularly among

younger age groups, is the pursuit of better income opportunities. This is followed by aspirations related to education, and the search for environments offering greater non-discrimination, personal freedoms and expanded life choices.<sup>4</sup> Similar research also suggests that women's emigration decisions, however, remain strongly shaped by family dynamics. Marriage and the employment of a spouse or partner continue to constitute key drivers of women's outward mobility, indicating that many women migrate as part of family strategies rather than primarily in pursuit of their own

<sup>1</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute. 2025. [Labour Force Statistics, September 2025](#).

<sup>2</sup> UNDESA. 2025. [International Migrant Stock 2024](#). Table 1, cells F155 and M155. This figure includes Syrians under Temporary Protection.

<sup>3</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute. 2024. [International Migration Statistics](#).

<sup>4</sup> Boztilki, M. 2023. [Neden Gitmek İstiyorlar? Z Kuşağı Kadınların Göç Etme İstekleri Hakkında Bir Araştırma](#). Pamukkale Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi 55, pp. 157–172.



Women's labour force participation in Türkiye remains low at **31.8%**

The number of emigrants nearly doubled from **1.8 million to 3.1 million (1990-2024)**



**1 in 5**  
female emigrants  
is under the  
age of 14



In 2025,  
Türkiye recorded  
**24,205** ⚠️  
asylum applications to the EU

independent employment trajectories.<sup>5</sup> This pathway has delivered mixed outcomes: first-generation women often entered with lower education and weaker language skills, limiting labour-market outcomes. Later generations show education and employment gains and more dual-earner households.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Türkiye has become one of the top origin countries of EU Asylum applications, at 24,205 applications in 2025.<sup>7</sup>

**Immigration expanded dramatically over the past three decades.** Türkiye's immigrant numbers rose more than six-fold between 1990 and 2024 (from about **1.16 million** to **7 million**)<sup>8</sup> with women accounting for roughly half of the total. However, this aggregate balance masks pronounced gendered patterns by nationality and migration channels. Women are overrepresented among immigrants from Central Asian and Eastern European countries, including the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia,<sup>9</sup> which can be explained by different trends and types of migration to Türkiye from these countries, including the marriage migration of Russian women, care migration from Central Asian countries, forced migration of Ukrainian women since the large-scale invasion in 2022, while husbands remain to fight, etc.<sup>10</sup> However, since 2022–2023, Türkiye has begun to experience a reversal in migration trends, characterised both by an increase in emigration and a decline in new immigration. Importantly, the rise in emigration includes not only Turkish nationals leaving the country but also a growing number of previously arrived migrants departing Türkiye, resulting in net outflows.

**Irregular migration remains insufficiently visible in Türkiye.** Sex-disaggregated figures are largely unavailable, limiting a full understanding of women's presence in irregular migration flows. However, existing labour migration data suggest important gendered dynamics: despite representing a substantial share of immigrants in Türkiye, women account for only **28.8 per cent** of work permits issued,<sup>11</sup> indicating that many migrant women may be working outside formal labour channels. Partial evidence points to a significant presence of women in informal sectors such as domestic work, entertainment, textiles, tourism and sex work, where exploitation risks are high and labour oversight is weakest, particularly in private households.<sup>12</sup>

**Forced displacement is widespread and highly gendered.** In September 2025 there were almost **2.5 million** registered Syrians,<sup>13</sup> with women and children constituting **73.3 per cent**. Weak access to formal employment, combined with barriers in accessing essential services, significantly constrains women's autonomy and safety. High unmet needs in education, health and social protection increase women's dependence on care and support systems, while the very limited reach of work permits combined with persistent language barriers restrict independent income generation, reduce bargaining power, and heighten vulnerability to exploitation and insecurity.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Çitil-Akyol, C. 2024. "Perceptions of women of Turkish origin living abroad on being a migrant: Existence as a woman." *International Migration* 62 (6), pp. 175–188.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat. 2026. [Asylum applications - annual statistics](#).

<sup>8</sup> UNDESA. 2025. [International Migrant Stock 2024](#). Table 1, cells F155 and M155.

<sup>9</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute. 2024. [International Migration Statistics](#).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Sağıroğlu, A. Z., Ünsal, R. & Özenci, F. 2025. [Türkiye Göç ve İnsan Hareketliliği Yıllığı 2022](#).

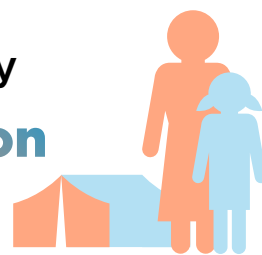
<sup>12</sup> İçduygu, A., et al. 2024. [Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Göç Politikaları, 1923-2023: Ulus-Devlet Oluşumundan Ulus-Ötesi Dönüşümlere](#). (In Turkish).

<sup>13</sup> Mülteciler Derneği. 2025. [Number of Syrians in Türkiye](#).

<sup>14</sup> UN Women. 2019. [Strengthening Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey: Turkey Country Facts](#).

Women account for only **28.8%** of work permits issued to migrants

Türkiye hosts approximately **2.5 million registered Syrians**



**73.3%** of Syrian refugees are women and children

Return migration to Türkiye includes a substantial number of women, with 100,732 Turkish citizens returning in 2024, 38 per cent of whom were women. Evidence on women returnees remains limited and does not allow for a comprehensive gender analysis, but available data suggest differentiated outcomes. While migration experience can positively affect women's labour income, particularly for those with higher education who tend to access better employment opportunities, female returnees still earn less than men with comparable qualifications.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, studies indicate that women, especially those who are highly skilled, are less likely to return than men, often due to gender inequalities in the labour market and broader social and political conditions that constrain opportunities and lifestyle choices.<sup>16</sup>

**Climate change, environmental degradation and disasters such as earthquakes are increasing internal displacement.** The 2023 earthquakes triggered massive internal displacement and outward migration, with **538,000 IDPs** by the end of 2024, disproportionately af-

fecting women.<sup>17</sup> Many migrated with children or elderly relatives, faced increased care responsibilities, precarious work, psychological distress and weakened support networks, with prolonged reconstruction turning temporary moves into permanent displacement,<sup>18</sup> especially for vulnerable groups, including Syrian women.<sup>19</sup>

**Trafficking data confirm gendered vulnerability.** Between 2019 and 2023, **1,466** victims were formally identified in Türkiye, of whom **82 per cent** were female, including 266 girls.<sup>20</sup> The official figures probably do not reflect the real extent of the phenomenon in Türkiye, due to difficulties in the detection and identification of victims and taking into account the high numbers of refugees and Syrians under temporary protection, the transit of irregular migrants, and the social acceptance of child labour and child marriage.<sup>21</sup> Sexual exploitation accounted for just over half of identified cases, followed by labour exploitation. While specialized shelters exist for victims of trafficking, capacity and accessibility constraints limit reach and effective protection.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Dudu, S., & Rojo, T. 2023. [Turkish returned immigrants' income by gender perspective](#). Applied Economics Letters, 30(7), 919–922.

<sup>16</sup> Güngör, N. D., & Tansel, A. 2014. [Brain drain from Turkey: Return intentions of skilled migrants](#). International Migration, 52(5).

<sup>17</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. 2025. [Global Report on Internal Displacement 2025](#).

<sup>18</sup> Eraslan, A. 2024. ["Between Transience and Permanence: Forced Migration Experience of Hatay Residents after the 6 and 20 February 2023 Earthquakes."](#) Folklor / Edebiyat, 30 (4/1): 120.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Council of Europe. 2024. [Report concerning the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Türkiye](#).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

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