



Solidarity with OTHERS



# Between Change and Continuity

Rethinking the Refugee Situation in Türkiye post-Presidential  
Elections

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# Between Change and Continuity: Rethinking the Refugee Situation in Türkiye post-Presidential Elections

## Introduction: Turkish Elections and Refugee Flow

Türkiye had a crucial presidential election on May 2023.<sup>1</sup> In the first election round on May 14, no candidate could reach more than 50 % of the vote.<sup>2</sup> Then the second round of the election took place between the two candidates with the most votes, who are Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, incumbent president, and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, main opposition party leader. As a result of the second round of elections, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 52.18 % of the vote, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu received 47.82 % and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan got re-elected as president.<sup>3</sup>

Elections were regarded as a kind of milestone for Türkiye by different sides in terms of the questions of an increase in authoritarianism, backsliding of democracy and freedom, and increase in human rights grievances.<sup>4</sup> Yet, there was also another issue that concerns the international community, particularly the European Union (EU), which is the refugee issue.<sup>5</sup> Türkiye has the largest number of refugees in the world, with an estimated four million displaced individuals, many of them are from Syria and other Arab nations.<sup>6</sup> On March 18, 2016, the European Council and Türkiye achieved an agreement to halt the flow of illegal migration from Türkiye to Europe. According to the EU-Turkey Statement, in short, all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Greece from Türkiye and whose asylum applications have been deemed ineligible should be returned to Türkiye.<sup>7</sup>

Kılıçdaroğlu, the main opposition leader and the candidate for the election, drew a lot of attention, while campaigning for the elections, to the wrongdoings of the government on the refugee issue and the fallacy of the agreement with the EU on this issue and gained support from many voters on his arguments.<sup>8</sup> But, in the end, Erdoğan won the elections and these statements by the opposition remained in the public mind as an unenforceable, for now, but powerful statement, which can lead Erdoğan and the government to review their refugee policy and implement new resettlement policies upon refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> Rajvanshi, A. (2023, May 11). Türkiye's crucial election is coming. here's what to know. Time. <https://time.com/6279098/Türkiye-election-2023/>

<sup>2</sup> Tuysuz, G., Gezer, Y., & Qiblawi, T. (2023, May 29). Erdogan wins Turkish election, extending rule to Third decade. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/28/europe/Türkiye-president-runoff-polls-erdogan-intl/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> CNN TÜRK. (2023, June 1). 2. Tur seçim SONUÇLARI 2023: 28 mayıs cumhurbaşkanlığı seçim Sonuçları Ysk! - 2023 Seçim Haberleri. CNN TÜRK. <https://www.cnntrk.com/turkiye/secim-2023/2-tur-secim-sonuclari-2023-28-mayis-cumhurbaskanligi-secim-sonuclari-ysk>

<sup>4</sup> Foster, A. (2023, May 20). Türkiye election: Why the world is watching the presidential race. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65647483>

<sup>5</sup> Gavin, G. (2023, May 18). I'll kick all refugees out of Türkiye, Erdoğan rival vows. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/kick-all-refugees-out-Türkiye-kemal-kilicdaroglu-recep-tayyip-erdogan-election/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament. (2023, May 20). EU-Türkiye Statement & Action Plan: Legislative Train Schedule. European Parliament. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-Türkiye-statement-action-plan>

<sup>8</sup> NTV. (2023, May 18). Kılıçdaroğlu: Ben İktidara Gelir Gelmez Tüm Mültecileri Evlerine Göndereceğim. ntv.com.tr. <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/kilicdaroglu-ben-iktidara-gelir-gelmez-tum-multecileri-evlerine-gonderecegim.PFHFD6ZmKEmjyxMqOoApwx>

<sup>9</sup> Sade, G. (2023, May 24). Ab "Suriyelilerin Bir Yıl İçinde Gönderileceği" Vaadine Nasıl Bakıyor? euronews. <https://tr.euronews.com/2023/05/24/avrupa-birligi-suriyelilerin-bir-yil-icinde-gonderilecegi-taahhudune-nasil-bakiyor>

## Understanding the Syrian Refugee Crisis and Türkiye's Role

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Türkiye officially hosts 3.9 million people combining refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>10</sup> Yet, according to unofficial claims, there are rumored to be more than 6-7 million illegal and legal refugees and asylum-seekers in total.<sup>11</sup> When taking into account the geographical location of Türkiye, it is a first reception and transit nation for many refugees and migrants.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, it seems that Türkiye has a critical and decisive role in managing the so-called refugee crisis in the Middle East and Mediterranean area with additional support from the EU and the international community.<sup>13</sup>

Syria's status remains confused and unsettled after ten years of conflict. Violence fluctuates between greater and lower levels from month to month; economic circumstances are severely harmed; infrastructure is in disrepair; and the security/legislation matter remains unresolved. As a result, between 2015 and 2018, just 103,090 Syrians returned voluntarily, accounting for approximately 2% of the Syrian refugees living in surrounding countries, including Türkiye.<sup>14</sup><sup>15</sup>

With the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, parties have started measures to halt the flow of migrants crossing from Türkiye to the EU territory via Greece, which endorsed the position of Türkiye as Europe's gatekeeper.<sup>16</sup> The EU acknowledged that such a solution was far from flawless, but that collaboration with Türkiye had become a must in order to deal with the emerging unprecedented circumstances.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, in close collaboration with Türkiye, the EU has accelerated the disbursement of the initially allocated 6 billion Euros under 'the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye' to relieve refugees and support host communities in the country, with the goal of ensuring that their necessities are addressed comprehensively.<sup>18</sup> As a result of the statement, arrivals from Türkiye in the Aegean Sea islands have decreased by 97% in two years, averaging around 80 per day, compared to the daily average, 3022, in 2015.<sup>19</sup>

The agreement permitted the Turkish president to maintain one foot in and one foot out of the European geopolitical environment. The EU implicitly recognized Türkiye as a safe country. In order for a country to be designated as safe, four requirements must be completed. First,

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR. (2023). Türkiye. Global Focus. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/t%C3%BCrkiye#:~:text=T%C3%BCrkiye%20hosts%20four%20million%20refugees,and%20maintains%20the%20geographical%20limitation>.

<sup>11</sup> Akpamuk, G. (2023, May 25). Türkiye'Deki Suriyelilerin çoğu neden Kayıt Dışı çalışıyor, Hükümetin Bu Konuda Politikası Ne? BBC News Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/cz51zr816mlo>

<sup>12</sup> European Economic and Social Committee. (2017, September 18). The role of Türkiye in the refugee crisis. European Economic and Social Committee. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/role-Türkiye-refugee-crisis>

<sup>13</sup> European Economic and Social Committee. (2018, February 14). The role of Türkiye in the Refugee Crisis (OWN-initiative opinion). European Economic and Social Committee. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/role-Türkiye-refugee-crisis-own-initiative-opinion>

<sup>14</sup> Sharani, S. (2022). The Narratives of Syrian Refugees on Taking Türkiye as a Land of a Long or Temporary Settlement. In E. Balkan & Z. K. Tonak (Eds.), *Refugees on the Move: Crisis and Response in Türkiye and Europe* (pp. 281–311). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vr8tsk.17>

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR. (2021). Syria situation. Global Focus. [https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/syria-situation#:~:text=2021%20Situation%20overview&text=By%20the%20end%20of%202021,internally%20displaced%20people%20\(IDPs\)](https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/syria-situation#:~:text=2021%20Situation%20overview&text=By%20the%20end%20of%202021,internally%20displaced%20people%20(IDPs)).

<sup>16</sup> de Martin, N. (2023, April 2). Türkiye's weaponisation of the refugee crisis. Jason Institute for Peace and Security Studies. <https://jasoninstitute.com/Türkiyes-weaponisation-of-the-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>17</sup> Tsarouhas, D. (2023, May 6). The critical role of Türkiye in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/05/06/the-critical-role-of-Türkiye-in-the-management-of-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>18</sup> European Commission. (2022). EU support to refugees in Türkiye. European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-support-refugees-turkiye\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-support-refugees-turkiye_en)

<sup>19</sup> European Commission. (2018). EU-TÜRKİYE STATEMENT Two years on. Migration and Home Affairs. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/20180314\\_eu-Türkiye-two-years-on\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/20180314_eu-Türkiye-two-years-on_en.pdf)

the country must not create its own refugees (forced internal displacement). Second, it is necessary to be a country where migrants seek asylum. Third, no persecution, torture, or humiliating treatment must be permitted in the country. Finally, it must adhere to the principle of non-refoulement (not returning refugees to countries where they have previously been punished).<sup>20</sup> Yet, according to some, the Turkish government is now failing to achieve these standards.<sup>21</sup>

During the process, the Justice and Development Party's (AKP), the ruling party in Türkiye, potential to exploit migration emerged and was demonstrated further when the president promised to "open the doors of Europe" to refugees in response to criticism for a massive attack in northern Syria in 2019-2020.<sup>22</sup> Especially after the Idlib attack in which "dozens of Turkish soldiers were killed in an airstrike carried out by Russian forces in Syria's Idlib province in 2020,"<sup>23</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan presided over an emergency security conference and expressed that they opened the Türkiye-Greece border<sup>24</sup> and Syrian refugees would no longer be barred from entering Europe, which was regarded as an effort to gain backing for the operations in Northern Syria from both the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>25</sup> Following allegations that migrants in Türkiye will not be prevented from traveling to Europe following the attack on Turkish soldiers in Idlib, refugees began marching to Europe. Some migrants marched in groups toward the Greek border, particularly in Edirne. With this decision, the number of irregular migrants on the Aegean coast surged. President Erdoğan began accusing European leaders of failing to keep their commitments to assist Türkiye in bearing the weight of millions of Syrians.<sup>26</sup>

Although Türkiye, which has been heavily damaged by the COVID-19 issue,<sup>27</sup> has maintained his migration agreement with the EU, accommodating Afghan refugees following the Taliban takeover in 2021 and continuing to accept Syrian asylum seekers, Erdoğan has kept weaponizing the refugee issue, winning domestic support through Islamic moral feelings as well as moral standing as a result of the EU's inability to respect human rights. It remains to be seen how Türkiye's role as a gatekeeper will affect the economy, particularly in light of the terrible February 2023 earthquake, which has exacerbated refugee flows from Syria and led to high rates of internal displacement. It seems that the migration agreement appears to be on a precarious balance due to these domestic and regional occurrences.<sup>28</sup>

## Implications for Refugee Policies and European Consequences

Increased political unrest and instability in Türkiye, along with the failure to resolve the Syrian issue, has heightened tensions over the integration and lodging of millions of refugees. The Turkish administration is undecided about how far it wants to integrate Syrian refugees

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<sup>20</sup> de Martin, N. (2023, April 2). Türkiye's weaponisation of the refugee crisis. Jason Institute for Peace and Security Studies. <https://jasoninstitute.com/Turkiyes-weaponisation-of-the-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Akca, I. (2023). The fineline between Pushbacks and illegal practices at the Greece-Turkiye border. Flipsnack. (p. 9). <https://www.flipsnack.com/peaceandjustice/pushbacks-report.html>

<sup>24</sup> Şahin-Mencütek, Z., Gökalp-Aras, N. E., Kaya, A., & Rottmann, S. B. (2023). Syrian Refugees in Türkiye: Between Reception and Integration. Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27366-7>

<sup>25</sup> McKernan, B. (2020, February 28). Dozens of Turkish soldiers killed in strike in Idlib in Syria. The Guardian. Retrieved June 19, 2023, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/27/dozens-of-turkish-soldiers-killed-in-strike-in-idlib-in-syria-reports-say>

<sup>26</sup> Baran, S. (2020, February 29). Türkiye Kapıları Açıyor Mu? Mülteciler Sınırlara Yürüyor. euronews. Retrieved June 19, 2023, from <https://tr.euronews.com/2020/02/28/turkiye-kapilari-aciyor-mu-multeciler-yunanistan-a-dogru-yurumeye-basladi>

<sup>27</sup> Cavus, U. (2022, March 23). The impacts of the covid-19 on Turkish economy and policy recommendations on government spending. HEconomist. <https://heconomist.ch/2022/03/23/the-impacts-of-the-covid-19-on-turkish-economy-and-policy-recommendations-on-government-spending/>

<sup>28</sup> de Martin, N. (2023, April 2). Türkiye's weaponisation of the refugee crisis. Jason Institute for Peace and Security Studies. <https://jasoninstitute.com/Turkiyes-weaponisation-of-the-refugee-crisis/>

into the country. Some significant civil society stakeholder organizations, notably trade unions, contend that informal employment by refugees violates minimum wage regulations and thereby penalizes Turkish employees.<sup>29</sup> Locals in Türkiye continue to consider Syrians a demographic danger and a competing group for public services.<sup>30</sup> Incidents of violence between Syrian refugees and locals, occasionally which ended in murders and widespread urban violence, have been on the rise, particularly in western urban areas where cultural misunderstandings and disparities are as profound as those between Syrians and inhabitants of EU member states.<sup>31</sup> Integration is also getting more challenging because Syrians now form majorities in several places along the country's southern border and in particular sections of Istanbul, the country's city with 17-million-person.<sup>32</sup> “Public opinion polls suggest that most Turks see Syrian refugees as neither willing nor able to integrate into Turkish society.”<sup>33</sup> The Turkish people's once-welcoming attitude has given way to growing rage, as it becomes evident that the majority of Syrians want to remain in the country even if a political solution is achieved in Syria.<sup>34,35</sup>

The issue is no longer a matter of showing support and solidarity for these people escaping war. When President Erdoğan floated the idea of awarding Syrians citizenship in 2016, the opposition vehemently rejected it, and a public outcry pushed Erdoğan to retreat.<sup>36</sup> Although more than 200,000 Syrians had been given citizenship by 2023,<sup>37</sup> the government now maintains that all Syrian refugees would ultimately return home, an implausible scenario considering the realities in their native country.<sup>38</sup>

Before the presidential election in Türkiye, there was a consensus among analysts that “along with inflation and the centralization of power in the hands of the government, the refugee issue will for the most part determine the elections outcome.”<sup>39</sup> Although anti-Syrian sentiments originated before the most recent municipal elections (spring of 2019), they are now seriously penetrating the Turkish electorate.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, supporters of President Erdoğan's authority maintained an open-door policy toward Syrian refugees.<sup>41</sup> The more conservative segments of Erdoğan's constituency

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<sup>29</sup> Tsarouhas, D. (2023, May 6). The critical role of Türkiye in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/05/06/the-critical-role-of-Türkiye-in-the-management-of-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>30</sup> Imrie-Kuzu, D. & Özerdem, A. (2023). Keeping Syrian refugees in Türkiye is not a good idea: a new concept of ‘reluctant local integration’, *Third World Quarterly*, 44:7, 1606-1624, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2023.2197205

<sup>31</sup> International Crisis Group. (2018, December 28). Türkiye's Syrian refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions. Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/Türkiye/248-Türkiyes-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions>

<sup>32</sup> Tsarouhas, D. (2023, May 6). The critical role of Türkiye in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/05/06/the-critical-role-of-Türkiye-in-the-management-of-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. (p. 7)

<sup>34</sup> Jones, D. (2019, November 1). Many Syrian refugees in Türkiye want to stay, despite Erdogan plan to force their return. VOA. [https://www.voanews.com/a/europe\\_many-syrian-refugees-Türkiye-want-stay-despite-erdogan-plan-force-their-return/6178633.html#:~:text=Breaking%20News-.Many%20Syrian%20Refugees%20in%20Türkiye%20Want%20to%20Stay%2C%20Despite,Plan%20to%20Force%20Their%20Return&text=Turkish%20President%20Recep%20Tayyip%20Erdogan's,Syria%20is%20increasingly%20in%20question.](https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_many-syrian-refugees-Türkiye-want-stay-despite-erdogan-plan-force-their-return/6178633.html#:~:text=Breaking%20News-.Many%20Syrian%20Refugees%20in%20Türkiye%20Want%20to%20Stay%2C%20Despite,Plan%20to%20Force%20Their%20Return&text=Turkish%20President%20Recep%20Tayyip%20Erdogan's,Syria%20is%20increasingly%20in%20question.)

<sup>35</sup> Anadolu Agency. (2022, March 21). Most Syrians in Türkiye are happy, more willing to stay: Study. Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/Türkiye/most-syrians-in-Türkiye-are-happy-more-willing-to-stay-study/news>

<sup>36</sup> Tsarouhas, D. (2023, May 6). The critical role of Türkiye in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/05/06/the-critical-role-of-Türkiye-in-the-management-of-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>37</sup> Ahval News. (2022, April 22). Türkiye says over 200,000 Syrians granted citizenship. <https://ahvalnews.com/Türkiye-syrians/Türkiye-says-over-200000-syrians-granted-citizenship>

<sup>38</sup> Petillo, K. (2022, May 9). Türkiye's Open door closes: How europe can better support syrian refugees. European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu/article/Türkiyes-open-door-closes-how-europe-can-better-support-syrian-refugees/>

<sup>39</sup> Italian Institute for International Political Studies. (2023, May 12). The refugee issue and the Turkish elections: What's at stake? ISPI. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-refugee-issue-and-the-turkish-elections-whats-at-stake-128676>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

perceived the refugee policy as a gesture of Muslim piety or Islamic solidarity.<sup>42</sup> Opposition organizations, on the other hand, have long been skeptical of the government's inclusive agenda.<sup>43</sup> Many people thought that Erdoğan was creating a future electorate.<sup>44</sup> Their objections were motivated by political and security concerns.<sup>45</sup> Some opponents of the government policy toward migrants claimed the AKP political elite was working on a more grandiose goal, which is integrating almost four million Syrians to be able to reshape Türkiye's identity by solidifying Muslim-conservative characteristics.<sup>46</sup>

The rising socioeconomic cost of Syria's presence has intensified inter-ethnic tensions and fostered opposition toward the government's refugee programs. The COVID-19 outbreak, Turkish currency devaluation, and ensuing severe inflation have all harmed the Turkish public's attitude toward refugees. More importantly, many of Erdoğan's supporters have changed their views on government policy.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, the topic has taken center stage in the political discourse leading up to the presidential election. The issue has captured the attention of the electorate, including many undecided voters and government supporters, which caused that the AKP political elite's view on refugees has shifted. That's why while not rejecting the open-door policy, the Turkish government has begun to consider refugee return schemes.<sup>48</sup>

During the election campaign process, the main opposition candidate used tougher language and attitude towards the refugee issue. In this regard, he has “committed to returning displaced Syrians to their home country within two years.”<sup>49</sup> Additionally, he has expressed his intention to mend relations with Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria.<sup>50</sup> Growing anti-refugee sentiment showed itself at the ballot box in the first round of the elections, and nationalists performed well, especially far-right nationalist presidential candidate Sinan Oğan, who unexpectedly got 5.2 % of the vote.<sup>51</sup> Yet, in the final round of elections, Erdoğan won the elections with 52.18 % of the vote.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, election results have resulted in the fact that Syrians in Türkiye feel relieved after Erdoğan's win. In an interview of Al Jazeera with a Syrian person living in Türkiye, this person stated that for him and his family, Erdoğan's victory is more 'comfortable' because Erdoğan's opponent built his campaign on racism against us refugees, which is troubling.<sup>53</sup> Another Syrian interviewee mentioned that “although he couldn't vote, he followed the campaign closely, hoping fellow Syrians who hold Turkish citizenship would back Erdoğan.”<sup>54</sup> Despite the temporary relief, many Syrian refugees and asylum seekers remain cautious because, during the election campaign, Erdoğan

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<sup>42</sup> Tol, G. (2019, August 21). From “compassionate Islamism” to “Türkiye first.” Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/compassionate-islamism-Türkiye-first>

<sup>43</sup> Tokyay, M. (2022, February 6). Survey shows negative attitudes among Turks towards Syrians on the rise. Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2019381/middle-east>

<sup>44</sup> Yetkin, M. (2022, March 17). “Erdoğan Sığınmacıları Vatandaş Yapıp Oy Mu Kullandıracak?” - yetkin report: Siyaset, Ekonomi Haber-Analiz, yorum. Yetkin Report | Siyaset, Ekonomi Haber-Analiz, Yorum. <https://yetkinreport.com/2022/03/17/erdogan-siginmacilari-vatandas-yapip-oy-mu-kullandiracak/>

<sup>45</sup> Tokyay, M. (2022, February 6). Survey shows negative attitudes among Turks towards Syrians on the rise. Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2019381/middle-east>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Italian Institute for International Political Studies. (2023, May 12). The refugee issue and the Turkish elections: What's at stake? ISPI. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-refugee-issue-and-the-turkish-elections-whats-at-stake-128676>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Gavin, G. (2023, May 18). I'll kick all refugees out of Türkiye, Erdoğan rival vows. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/kick-all-refugees-out-Türkiye-kemal-kilicdaroglu-recep-tayyip-erdogan-election/>

<sup>50</sup> Gostoli, Y. (2023, May 27). Turkish presidential run-off leaves Syrians with uncertain future. Refugees News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/27/turkish-presidential-run-off-leaves-syrians-with-uncertain-future>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> CNN TÜRK. (2023, June 1). 2. Tur seçim SONUÇLARI 2023: 28 mayıs cumhurbaşkanlığı seçim Sonuçları Ysk! - 2023 Seçim Haberleri. CNN TÜRK. <https://www.cnntrk.com/turkiye/secim-2023/2-tur-secim-sonuclari-2023-28-mayis-cumhurbaskanligi-secim-sonuclari-ysk>

<sup>53</sup> D'Ignoti, S. (2023, June 8). Future unknown but Syrians in Türkiye “relieved” after Erdogan win. Refugees News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/8/future-unknown-but-syrians-in-Türkiye-relieved-after-erdogan-win>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

promised to "voluntarily repatriate" one million Syrians as well while planning to normalize relations with Bashar al-Assad, which can lead these Syrians to face new paperwork or other pressures to stay legal, such as increased rent and utility bills, feel insecure, and be fearful of the unknown.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

On May 2023, Türkiye had an important presidential election. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected president. A variety of groups saw the elections as a watershed moment for Türkiye, particularly regarding the refugee crisis. Kılıçdaroğlu, the primary opposition leader and election candidate, attracted a lot of attention to the government's wrongdoings on the refugee crisis, as well as the absurdity of the deal with the EU on this topic, and garnered support from many people on his points.

Türkiye is home to official 3.9 million people, a mix of migrants and asylum seekers. With the March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement, the parties affirmed Türkiye's role as Europe's gatekeeper by taking action to restrict the flow of migrants from Türkiye through Greece to EU territory. While Türkiye has maintained its migration deal with the EU by hosting Afghan refugees and continuing to accept Syrian asylum seekers after the Taliban seized power in 2021, Erdoğan has continued to weaponize the refugee issue, gaining domestic support through Islamic moral sentiments and moral posturing as a result of the EU's lack of respect for human rights.

Increased political upheaval and instability in Türkiye, as well as the inability to resolve the Syrian crisis, have raised concerns about the integration and housing of millions of refugees. The Turkish government is unsure how far it wants to integrate Syrian refugees into the country. Locals in Türkiye continue to regard Syrians as a demographic threat and a competitor for public services. The question is no longer one of displaying solidarity and support for these individuals fleeing conflict. Syria's mounting socioeconomic burden has heightened inter-ethnic tensions and fueled hostility to the government's refugee efforts.

The opposition has promised to repatriate displaced Syrians to their homeland. Although they lost the elections, the opposition's words lingered in the public imagination as an unenforceable, but strong declaration that can drive Erdoğan and the government to rethink their refugee policy and establish new resettlement procedures for refugees.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



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