

Safe on Paper, Unsafe in Reality:

Turkey and EU Return Policy

In 2025, the European Commission launched a major overhaul of the EU return framework, proposing an EU list of safe countries of origin, a revised safe third country concept, and a new regulation to accelerate returns.

Under these new rules, Turkey is considered a “safe” country of origin, could be treated as a “safe” third country, and may become a destination for forced returns through bilateral agreements.

But Turkey is NOT safe – not for Turkish nationals, nor asylum seekers, migrants, or refugees. Here's why:

What happens to Turkish nationals?

- Political repression has intensified after the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul Mayor and key opposition leader
- **Protests** against İmamoğlu's arrest were **met with violence and repression**:
 - As of late March, at least 1,879 people detained in connection with the protests
 - Detainees were exposed to handcuffing, abuses, and sexual violence
- Before İmamoğlu, 14 mayors were ousted between 2024 and 2025
- A proposed “**agents of influence**” law will further criminalize civil society, if passed
- A proposed bill **criminalizes “promotion” of LGBTQIA+ identities** and introduce prison sentences for same-sex ceremonies



This is the reality for Turkish citizens – not a “safe country.”



Read about the Kobani case, that sentenced 24 Kurdish opposition leaders to jail for “disrupting the unity and territorial integrity of the state”

What happens to people on the move in Turkey?



Surveillance, repression and silence deportations

- Constant ID checks, arbitrary arrests, and police abuse
- **Non-refoulement is routinely violated** – often with no due process
 - Hundreds of Syrians deported since 2018, many presented as “voluntary return”
 - 44,768 Afghans deported in recent years
- **Detention centers** are overcrowded, unsanitary, and degrading
 - People sleep on floors and face lack of food, health care, legal aid, and widespread psychological distress
 - Police officers have been filmed abusing detainees!



The limits of Turkey's asylum system

- Turkey applies the Refugee Convention only to Europeans, asylum seekers from elsewhere are denied full refugee status
- Greek Supreme Court (March 2025) annulled the Greek government's designation of Turkey as a 'safe third country' !
- Since 2020, Turkey has refused to readmit rejected asylum seekers from Greece, making the safe third country concept application by Greece arbitrary in practice

🔍 According to Human Rights Watch, Turkey **lacks meaningful asylum procedures**, and people have been pushed back even further from its borders into danger zones



This is the reality for people on the move in Turkey – not a “safe country.”



- Read the stories of:
- Abdul Eyse, detained in Turkey and forced into “voluntary return”
 - Ahmet Handan El Naif, a 17-year-old Syrian refugee killed in Antalya