

# Turkey



## Quick facts

Number of IDPs	954,000 – 1,201,000
Percentage of total population	1.3 – 1.6%
Start of current displacement situation	1984
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	Undetermined
New displacement	0
Causes of displacement	Internal armed conflict, human rights violations



Around a million people were displaced from towns and villages in south-eastern Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the insurgent actions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the counter-insurgency policies of the Turkish government. Over 60 per cent of these IDPs were forced from their homes between 1991 and 1996.

As of July 2009, according to government statistics, a little over 150,000 people had returned to their places of origin. Others had returned only temporarily, usually in the summer months, commuting between cities and their villages of origin. Although security in the south-east has greatly improved since the 1990s, clashes between government forces and the PKK have increased since 2004, when the PKK announced the end of a five-year ceasefire, and particularly in the last three years, discouraging returns and even threatening new displacement.

In 2005, 75 per cent of IDPs were found in urban centres, both within affected provinces and elsewhere in Turkey. In 2009, most were living on the edges of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Adana, and in cities in the south-east such as Batman, Diyarbakir, Hakkari and Van, having settled among the urban poor, but facing discrimination, acute social and economic marginalisation and limited access to housing, education and health care. Problems particularly identified among forcibly displaced communities include trauma, low levels of education and high levels of unemployment, particularly among women. Child labour and domestic violence were reported to be increasing in urban centres.

Policies up to 2009 had largely promoted return as opposed to local integration or settlement elsewhere; however return had remained limited. Outstanding obstacles to sustainable return included the upsurge in violence, the continuing presence of government village guard militias, whose members were often implicated in the original causes of displacement, and close to a million landmines in provinces bordering Syria and Iraq. Return areas also lacked economic opportunities, social services, and basic infrastructure including clean water, electricity, telephone lines, schools and roads.

The government has taken notable steps to address the internal displacement situation. In 1994, it launched the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project to facilitate the return and rehabilitation of IDPs, and in 2005, it commissioned a national survey on the number and conditions of IDPs, drafted a national IDP strategy and adopted a law on compensation.

It also put together a comprehensive pilot plan in Van Province. The Van Action Plan (VAP) addresses rural and urban situations of displacement. The preparation of similar plans in 12 other provinces in the south-east was still ongoing at the end of 2009. They are intended to form the basis of a national action plan on which to base a comprehensive response to internal displacement.

However, gaps persist in the response, both for IDPs in the south-east and for those displaced in other parts of Turkey, and civil society observers have continued to voice concerns over the continuing situation of IDPs. They have criticised return programmes for the lack of support which they offer to returnees, and for lacking transparency, consistency, consultation and funding. Despite attempts to address some of these issues in the VAP, similar criticism continues to be voiced. The VAP has also been criticised for failing to acknowledge the Kurdish issue and insecurity, particularly the village guard system, in areas of return. There are also continuing concerns that the situation of IDPs outside the south-east remains unaddressed.

The issue of the place of Kurdish people in Turkey dominates the situation of displacement. The vast majority of IDPs are Kurdish, and their displacement and current situation is tied to the lack of recognition of the Kurdish identity. In the last few years, the government has taken a number of unprecedented steps towards a "democratic opening" which could have significant bearing on the response to displacement. Human rights organisations have nevertheless condemned continued discrimination and limitations in freedoms, and made repeated calls to address past human rights violations, and end the impunity of perpetrators.

Progress for IDPs in Turkey has been influenced by regional and international institutions such as the European Union, European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe. In his most recent report in 2009, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights underlined the need for a comprehensive plan to address the socio-economic problems faced by IDPs and to ensure sustainable durable solutions. If IDPs are to find sustainable solutions, the international community should continue to emphasise the need to address their situation in urban areas, the pervasive obstacles to their return, integration or resettlement, and encourage wider efforts to seek reconciliation.