

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
New displacement in 2008	0
Returns in 2008	Undetermined
Causes of displacement	Internal armed conflict, human rights violations
Human development index	84



Around a million people became 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 were forced from their homes between 1991 and 1996. The conflict has abated since 1999, but low-level violence between the PKK and security forces, which may have led to further displacement, continued in 2007 and 2008.

In 2005, 75 per cent of IDPs were found in urban centres, both within affected provinces and elsewhere in Turkey. Most were in 2008 living on the edges of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Adana, and in cities in the south-east such as Batman, Diyarbakir, Hakkari and Van. IDPs had settled among the urban poor, sharing with other migrants the problems of acute social and economic marginalisation and limited access to housing, schools and health facilities.

It is not clear whether IDPs, who are mainly of Kurdish origin, face specific forms of discrimination, but they do lack access to government programmes which target poor segments of the population and do not take into account the specific needs related to their displacement. Problems which IDPs have particularly identified include prevalent psychological and emotional trauma, low levels of education, and high unemployment among adults and particularly among displaced women. Displaced children have also had limited access to schooling, and child labour is reported as a problem in urban centres with significant displaced populations.

Most IDPs have not returned to their areas of origin, due to security concerns involving the continuing presence of mines and local militias belonging to the government's "village guard" system, and due to the lack of economic opportunities, social services and basic infrastructure (including clean water, electricity, telephone lines, schools and roads) in rural south-eastern Turkey. Others have returned only temporarily, usually in the summer months, commuting between cities and their villages of origin.

The government's response has evolved steadily. In 1994, it launched the "Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project" to facilitate the return and rehabilitation of IDPs. It passed a

special compensation law in 2004, and in 2005 sponsored a comprehensive national survey on migration and displacement. The Van Action Plan, launched in 2006, provided a concrete model for addressing IDPs' and returnees' needs at the provincial level.

The government has made important progress in the past four years towards improving the overall national policy, and identifying and facilitating return to places of origin for Turkey's displaced. However, return programmes have been criticised for the lack of support which they offer to returnees, and in the past for lacking transparency, consistency, consultation and funding. NGOs have called for a government review of the national return programme in consultation with civil society, and commitment to reconciliation and reparation initiatives to address past human rights violations against IDPs.

The government in 2008 had still to formulate a national IDP plan of action, as it had aimed to do based upon the experience of the Van Action Plan. Some NGOs reported that the implementation of the Van Action Plan had progressed slowly for lack of resources. However, in May 2008, the government relaunched the Grand Anatolian Project Plan, an ambitious programme to provide irrigation and basic infrastructure in the south-east, two years after the European Commission underlined the need for a comprehensive plan to address socio-economic problems there.

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. The UN's involvement has centred on the office of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of IDPs. If IDPs are to find sustainable solutions, the international community should continue to emphasise the need to address the current situation facing IDPs in urban areas the pervasive obstacles to their return, and encourage wider efforts to seek reconciliation on the Kurdish issue.