

# Over 795,000 irregular migrants held since 2016 in Turkey

Turkey has been the main route for irregular migrants trying to cross to Europe due to disputes in home countries.



File photo - Photograph: Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı

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Over 795,000 irregular migrants and some 18,000 human smugglers have been held in Turkey since 2016, according to data revealed by security sources.

Turkey has become a gateway to Europe for migrants fleeing war or poverty in their home countries.

It has also become a “destination” country for these migrants due to its recent economic developments.

Many of these migrants are fleeing disputes in the Middle East, Caucasasia, and the Balkans.

Ankara has been handling the issue as a humanitarian crisis while continuing its fight against human smuggling and irregular migration.

Turkish forces have rescued 795,875 migrants since 2016 and brought to justice 18,775 smugglers, according to data compiled by Anadolu Agency.

As many as 4,883 smugglers have been remanded in custody.

This year, 177,654 migrants were rescued from the clutches of smugglers.

#### - Deathtraps

The migrants are smuggled to foreign countries after they pay as much as €500 to €7,000, depending on their financial status, said the sources who asked not be named due to restrictions on speaking to the media.

A luxury yacht is arranged for migrants who can afford it, while a vast majority suffers inhumane conditions in small boats.

Human smuggling involves big money, coming only third to drugs and terrorism, according to international reports.

Security forces have learned that the traffickers also help terrorists flee or enter Turkey.

A total of 343 Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) members, 249 PKK/KCK terrorists, 240 individuals exploiting religion and 13 far-left organization members have been nabbed while attempting illegal border crossings.

FETÖ and its U.S.-based leader Fetullah Gulen orchestrated Turkey's defeated coup of July 15, 2016, which left 251 people martyred and nearly 2,200 injured.

In its more than 30-year terror campaign against Turkey, the PKK — listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the U.S. and the EU — has been responsible for the deaths of some 40,000 people, including women, children, and infants.

Many migrants embark on these treacherous journeys filled with hopes of a better life but instead fall into death traps.

This year, 144 migrants died in road traffic accidents, and freezing and drowning in the sea, according to data from Turkey's Interior Ministry.

Twenty-eight migrants lost their lives at sea while trying to cross to Europe this year. This number was 93 in 2018, 56 in 2017, 192 in 2016 and 279 in 2015.

Also this year, 64 died in road traffic accidents.

In joint police operations with other countries, a total of 148 smugglers were arrested this year.

As a result of information sharing with the U.K., Italy, and Ukraine following an eight-month technical and physical surveillance, Iraqi national Akbar Omar Tawfeeq — the biggest human smuggler in Europe — was remanded in custody along with 53 others in Istanbul.

Operation Action Day carried out simultaneously with Germany, also led to the arrest of 16 smugglers.

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