

# PHYSICIAN MIGRATION FROM TURKEY TO GERMANY TODAY AND A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

Hande Güzel





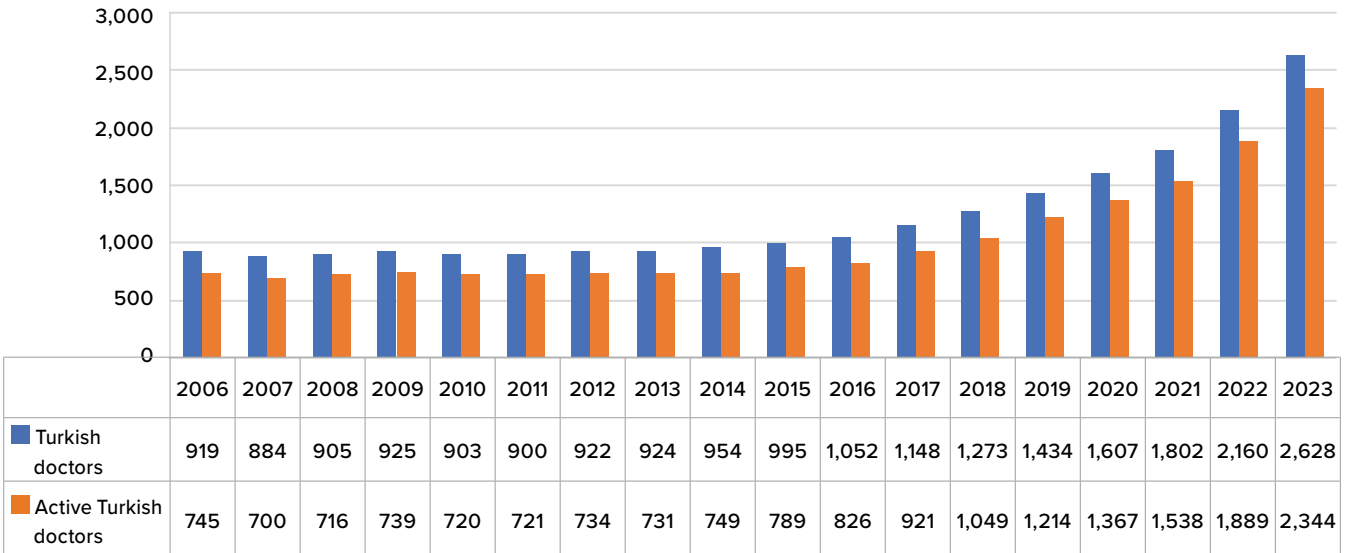
In January 2024, I wrote an analysis<sup>1</sup> to lay out the dynamics of the increasing number of immigrant doctors from Turkey working in Germany, based on the data between 2006 to 2022 released by the German Medical Association. This analysis illustrated that in addition to the accelerated increase in the number of Turkish doctors in Germany over the last decade, since 2017 this number has grown more rapidly than the total number of immigrant doctors in the country. Recently, the German Medical Association has made public the numbers on immigrant doctors in Germany as of the end of 2023. This analysis will discuss what the new numbers tell us, whether or not the trends laid out in the previous analysis are continuing, and provide some insights into the future of this migration group.

An initial look at the statistics in Figure 1 shows us that the number of Turkish doctors in Germany has continued to increase. From 2022 to 2023, the total number of Turkish doctors rose from 2,160 to 2,628, an increase of 468 doctors, whereas

the number of actively working Turkish doctors has risen from 1,889 to 2,344, an increase of 455 doctors. To put this increase in context, Figure 2 displays the annual growth rate of the number of Turkish doctors in Germany. In 2023, this rate was 21.7% for all Turkish doctors, and 24.1% for active Turkish doctors. Both of these rates are the highest annual growth rates recorded since 2006. This peak warrants significant attention by policymakers both in Turkey and in Germany as it hints at a continuing loss of the healthcare workforce for the former and an increasing diversification of the physician population for the latter.

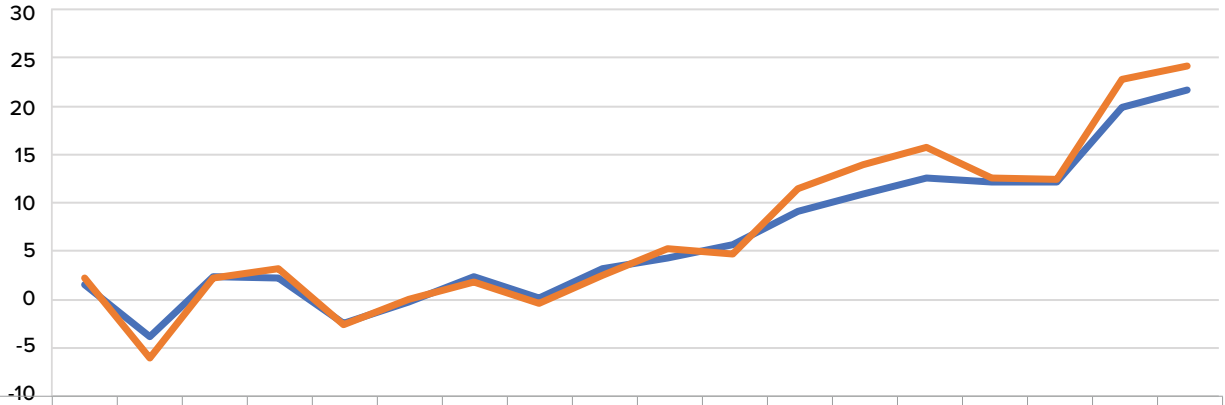
The most recent numbers also show a continuing increase in the percentage of actively working Turkish doctors among all immigrant doctors in Germany as can be seen in Figure 3. This number reached 3.68% in 2023, a 0.53% increase from 2022. This percentage is the highest since 2010. The German Medical Association has also noticed the increase in the number of Turkish doctors,

**Figure 1 Number of Turkish doctors in Germany**



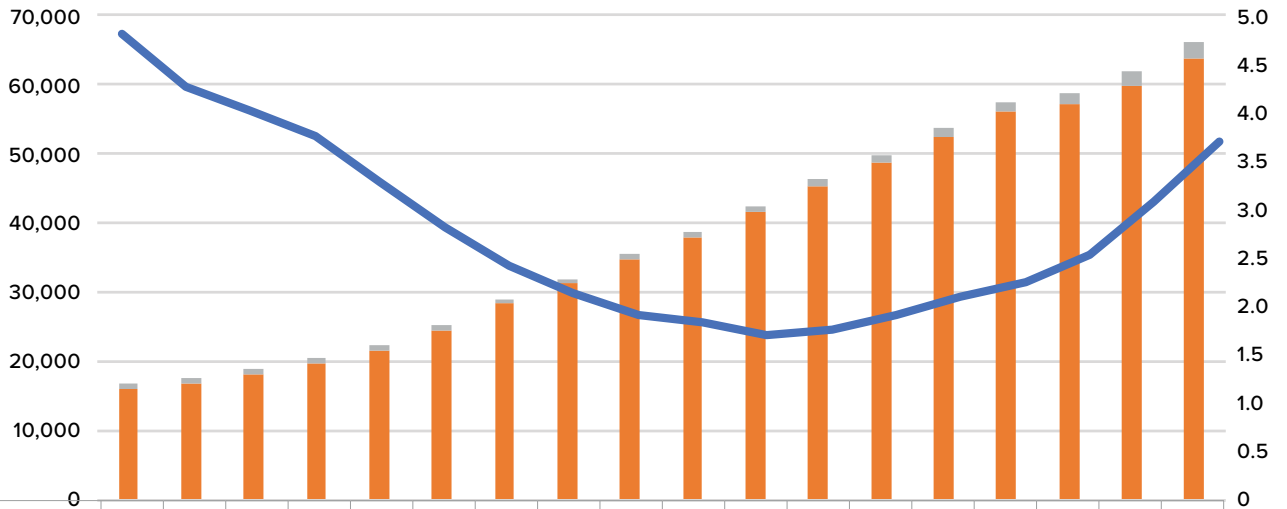


**Figure 2 Annual growth rate of the number of Turkish doctors in Germany (%)**



	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Turkish doctors</b>	1.5	-3.8	2.4	2.2	-2.4	-0.3	2.4	0.2	3.2	4.3	5.7	9.1	10.9	12.6	12.1	12.1	19.9	21.7
<b>Active Turkish doctors</b>	2.3	-6	2.3	3.2	-2.6	0.1	1.8	-0.4	2.5	5.3	4.7	11.5	13.9	15.7	12.6	12.5	22.8	24.1

**Figure 3 Immigrant doctors in Germany**



	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Number of Turkish doctors</b>	745	700	716	739	720	721	734	731	749	789	826	921	1,049	1,214	1,367	1,538	1,889	2,344
<b>Number of all immigrant doctors</b>	16,080	16,818	18,105	19,841	21,650	24,595	28,310	31,236	34,706	37,878	41,658	45,370	48,672	52,522	56,107	57,200	59,883	63,767
<b>% of Turkish doctors among all immigrant doctors</b>	4.63	4.16	3.95	3.72	3.33	2.93	2.59	2.34	2.16	2.08	1.98	2.03	2.16	2.31	2.44	2.69	3.15	3.68



stating that “the most common countries of origin [for physicians in Germany] are Syria (6,120), Romania (4,668), Austria (2,993), Greece (2,943), Russia (2,941) and Turkey (2,628)”—citing the number of all doctors, whether they are actively working or not.<sup>2</sup>

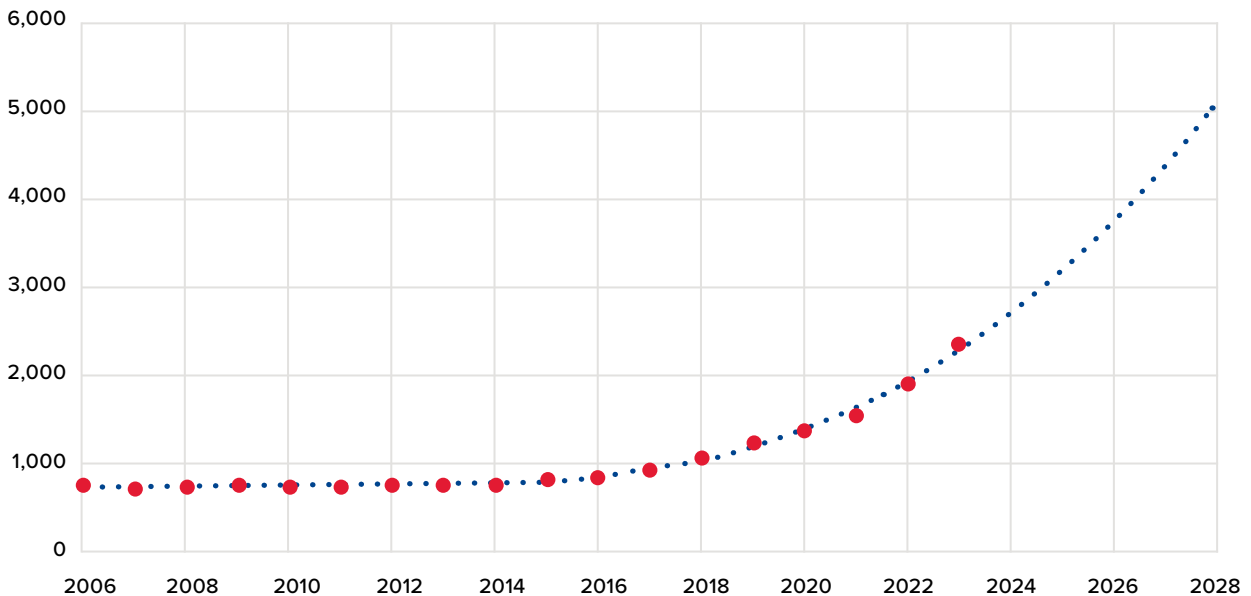
Turkey’s position as one of the top physician-sending countries can be expected to have significant consequences, especially given the history of migration between the two countries. On the one hand, the racialisation of Turkish immigrants may disrupt the doctor-patient relationship, while on the other, the increasing number of highly skilled Turkish immigrants in Germany may lead to a reimagining of Turkish identity.

## Projection of Future Trends in the Number of Turkish Doctors in Germany

Based on the descriptive statistics shared above, it is feasible to project future trends in the number of Turkish doctors in Germany.

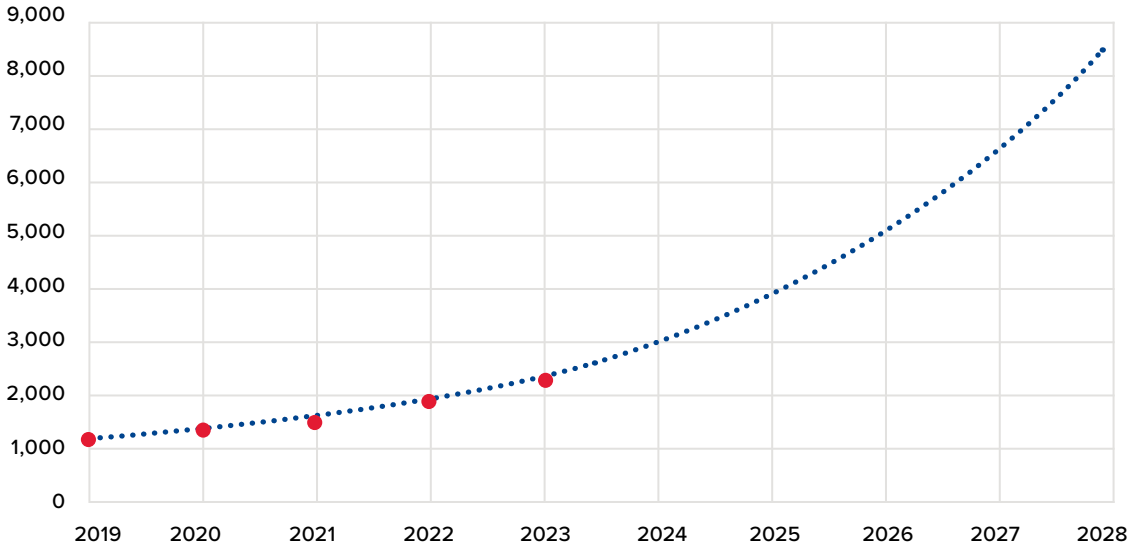
To predict the number of active Turkish doctors from 2023 onward, we first take the number of actively working Turkish doctors from 2006 to 2023 as a baseline and assume a future growth rate based on the average number of doctors over the entire period. Based on this baseline scenario, we estimate the number of actively working Turkish doctors in Germany to surpass 5,000 in five years, as Figure 4 displays.

**Figure 4** Projection of the number of actively working Turkish doctors, based on 2006-2023 data





**Figure 5 Projection of the number of actively working Turkish doctors, based on 2019-2023 data**



Given that we have seen a much more rapid increase in the migration of doctors from Turkey to Germany over the last five years, as can be seen in Figure 1, in the second projection, we only rely on data from the last five years, i.e., from 2019 to 2023, as our basis. The projections change significantly as Figure 5 illustrates. Based on the second exercise, we estimate the number of Turkish doctors in Germany to be close to 9,000 by 2028.

Of course, there are many dynamics and variables that could change these projections, including, but not limited to, the political climate in Turkey and Germany, the experiences of immigrant doctors in Germany, any changes to the working and living conditions of doctors in Turkey, as well as inflation and changes to the cost of living in both countries. We should also keep in mind that 2020 and 2021 were years with limited mobility due to the COVID-19 pandemic and hence may have skewed the projection. Nevertheless, in the event that these dynamics stay the same, these projections give us a glimpse into the changing healthcare

workforce dynamics in Turkey and Germany and urge policymakers to take necessary measures in their respective countries in order to cater to this migration group.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the migration of highly skilled workers will continue to be at the forefront of public and academic debates. The emigration of medical doctors attracts even more attention due to the fear of residents in Turkey that they will not be able to access adequate healthcare if the current trend continues. Hence, a glimpse into the future of physician migration may guide policymakers in Turkey to take necessary measures to retain doctors—the absence of which might significantly impact the general public. Simultaneously, these projections may also be helpful for policymakers in Germany to prepare for increased physician immigration and to further improve immigrants’ working and living conditions.



In the meantime, the impact of the Republican People's Party's recent electoral success (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), having won the highest number of votes in local elections on March 31, 2024, on the emigration of doctors from Turkey is yet to be understood. Narrative data from doctors considering migrating from Turkey to Germany shows two different patterns: while some are hopeful about the winds of change and hence are now hesitant to move abroad, others believe that change takes time and that they will still emigrate but may consider returning at some point.

Irrespective of the role that the recent local elections will play on migration flows, the most up-to-date statistics illustrate the continuing trend of doctors' emigration. As the political climate is only one of the core reasons for doctors leaving Turkey, it can be expected that this upward trend will continue unless other reasons such as doctors' difficult working conditions and the cost of living crisis are resolved.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 | Hande Güzel, "The Migration of Doctors from Turkey to Germany: What the Numbers Tell Us," *IPC-Mercator Analysis* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, January 2024), <https://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/Content/Images/CKeditorImages/20240201-19021086.pdf>.
- 2 | "Ergebnisse der Ärzttestatistik zum 31.12.2023," Bundesärztekammer, <https://www.bundesaerztekammer.de/baek/ueberuns/aerzttestatistik/>. The statistics for every year from 1996 to 2023 can be accessed from this webpage.



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