

SYRIAN REFUGES AND TURKEY'S REFUGE POLICIES

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The Syrian civil war has motivated the largest influx of refugees and perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. The huge influx of refugees has not only changed the nature of politics in the Middle East, but also in Europe and the U.S. The rise of right-wing political parties across Europe, the UK's withdrawal from the EU, changes in EU-Turkey relations, and the introduction of an immigration ban in the U.S. can all be regarded as direct or indirect consequences of the ongoing war in Syria.

Among many outside actors, Turkey has perhaps paid the greatest cost due to its geographical proximity to Syria. The country is now the top refugee-hosting country in the world. It hosts around four million refugees, who make up almost 5% of the country's population. The vast majority of its refugee population, 3.5 million, are from Syria, and the rest are from a small number of countries:

Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Somalia. Driven by the country's rapid transformation from a country of emigration and transit to a country of immigration, this article assesses the policies implemented toward Syrian refugees from 2011 to 2018 by the Turkish state, in conjunction with concurrent political developments at the national and international levels.

GRADUAL CHANGE IN THE COUNTRY'S SYRIAN REFUGEE POLICIES

Turkey's policies toward Syrian refugees have undergone a gradual transformation. Between 2011 and 2012, in compliance with a foreign policy aimed at crafting a Syria without Assad, the country opened its borders to Syrian refugees. It admitted them *en masse* and built refugee camps in the southern border cities to accommodate them. At this stage of the conflict, the Turkish state was quite

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confident that the war was going to come to an end in the near future and that the refugees would be returning home. The government, thus, adopted a legal ambiguity and called the Syrian refugees "guests," rather than granting them conventional refugee status. This did not constitute a violation of Turkey's international legal obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, because the country had placed a geographical limitation to the treaty, by which it accords refugee status only to refugees coming from the European countries. This lack of legal status did not pose a serious threat to the management of the refugee population, due to the fact that the number of Syrian refugees fleeing to Turkey amounted to only 14,000 by the end of 2012. However, in subsequent years, as the civil war spread rapidly with the involvement of many state and non-state actors, many more people were displaced.

At the end of 2014, the total number of Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey reached 1.5 million. At this stage, it was evident that Turkey's initial calculation was untenable and that the refugees were not going anywhere anytime soon. Given the political realities on the ground, the country chose to end the legal ambiguity by introducing new legislation, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection

(LIFP). The LIFP granted Syrian refugees temporary protection status.

Meanwhile, the European countries, challenged by a massive influx of refugees, either tightened their border controls or closed their borders entirely. The cost of closed borders was human lives. Many refugees trying to reach European shores lost their lives in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. These tragedies increased the humanitarian pressures on Europe to take action against the Syrian refugee crisis.

These pressures have temporarily altered the dynamics of Turkish-EU relations. Although Turkey's EU membership negotiations were frozen, the refugee crisis drew the EU closer to Turkey and motivated the signing of a deal in March 2016, by which Europe agreed to return every illegal refugee who reached the Greek islands to Turkey and resettle the same number of vetted Syrian refugees in Europe. Additionally, Europe would provide six billion euros in humanitarian aid to Turkey, lift the visa requirements for Turkish citizens, and resume the EU-Turkey membership negotiations. Although the number of Syrian refugees going to European countries dropped enormously² after the signing of the deal, the deal has not aided Turkey in any meaningful way. The number of Syrian refugees who have left Turkey for Europe since 2016 is around

¹ Guesthood and hospitality are important components of the culture or social fabric in countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon that host the most Syrian refugees. They provide an informal structure by which individual and state responsibilities toward refugees are discussed.

https://qz.com/883045/efforts-to-keep-foreigners-out-of-europe-are-working-germany-saw-a-69-drop-in-migrants-last-year/

12,000, which composes only 0.35% of the entire Syrian refugee population residing in the country.

The emergence of the YPG and ISIL as two major players on the ground, posed even greater security threats to the stability of Turkey. While Turkish Government recognizes YPG as a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Washington has backed the YPG in the fight against Islamic State in Syria. The country suffered immensely from ISIL attacks. Fifty-one people in Reyhanli, thirty-three people in Suruc, and hundred and seven people in Ankara lost their lives in attacks perpetrated by the members of ISIL, who also kidnapped 49 Turkish diplomats in Mosul after they captured the city. In spite of these disturbing events, Turkey chose not to engage in any large-scale military campaigns against the YPG and ISIL, other than organizing airstrikes between 2011 and 2015. Turkey's military approach during those years was rather passive and restrained. However, the country's domestic policies toward refugees and its military approach toward ISIL and the YPG soon began to change.

The Turkish government's objectives from 2016 onwards were to facilitate the integration of the refugees into the larger Turkish society and secure its borders against the YPG and ISIL. As a part of its new integrationist approach, the government started to issue work permits

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for Syrians. President Erdogan declared that Turkey could grant full citizenship to highly skilled Syrian refugees. However, as only 10% of the Syrian refugees had a university degree, this idea posed the danger of differential treatment of different groups of Syrians, similar to the experience of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Erdogan's citizenship proposal was more a reflection of his desire to create a new support base for the upcoming presidential elections scheduled to be held in November 2019. However, he could not garner a lot of public support for granting citizenship to Syrian refugees, even from his own political constituents, so he put the project on the back burner. Regarding the changing role of the military, the Turkish army carried out a cross border operation, known Operation Euphrates Shield, in 2016 and fought against the YPG and ISIL to secure the Turkish-Syrian border between Afrin and

In the end, Turkey realized it had to modify its policies toward Syria on the basis of new power dynamics in the region. Increasing Iranian and Russian support and the fall of Aleppo in 2016 tipped the balance even further in favor of the Assad regime. The only option left on the table was military and diplomatic rapprochement with Moscow and Tehran.

Manbij. At the end of the operation, the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army captured Manbij, and some 50,000 refugees returned there. The other large-scale military operation, Operation Olive Branch, was launched in January 2018, and YPG-controlled Afrin fell to the control of Turkish forces. President Erdogan has announced that some refugees will return to Afrin in the coming days. ³ In short, the focus of the country has shifted from eliminating Assad to securing its own borders and stopping a new influx of refugees.

Along with its refugee policies and level of military engagement, Turkey's alliance preferences have transformed in response to political developments taking place in the region. Turkey initially aligned its position with the U.S. and Europe,

asking Assad to step down. However, as the opposition forces were extremely divided and fighting against each other, the support of the U.S. and European countries for the Free Syrian Army dwindled very quickly. Some of these groups were even listed as terrorist organizations in the U.S. and Europe.

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Meanwhile, Turkey's relations with the U.S. were strained even further due to the countries' disagreement over the legitimacy of the YPG. On one hand, Turkey claims that the YPG is a splinter group from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, against which it has been fighting for almost four decades. On the other hand, the U.S. views the YPG as a legitimate and important ally for its military operations against ISIL in the region.

³ https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/politika/2018/01/28/erdogan-oso-ile-mehmedim-birlikte-yuruyor/

with Russia and Iran.

However, the only outcome of these negotiations was a common declaration and vow to eliminate ISIL and the elements of the Al-Nusra Front in Syria. The last of these diplomatic talks took place in Turkey in April and the parties reiterated their commitment to territorial integrity of Syria and achieving a lasting peace.

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In conclusion, the legal approach of Turkey toward Syrian refugees has

metamorphosed from non-recognition (2011-2014) to recognition (2014-2016) and from recognition to integration (2016-?). Likewise, the level of its military engagement has increased with a growing perception of the threat of ISIL attacks and the YPG's consolidation of power in northern Syria. Finally, Turkey's alliances have shifted largely over time. At the outset of the conflict, it formed an informal alliance with the U.S. and European countries. However, as the U.S. and Europe reduced their support for anti-regime forces, the country chose to relax its pre-conditions for negotiation and employ diplomacy to resolve the conflict.

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE EXPERIENCE IN TURKEY

A total of 3.5 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey today are beneficiaries of temporary protection status. They are permitted to reside in the country until they are provided with permanent resettlement in a third country. Ninety percent of them are living outside the refugee camps, have access to healthcare and education, and can obtain work permits. The legal status-based difference between conventional refugees and the beneficiaries of temporary protection does not

Although refugees have access to primary and secondary education, almost 350,000 Syrian children, making up 40% of the school-aged Syrian children, do not go to school in the country. Furthermore, despite new legislation passed in 2016 that enables Syrian refugees to apply for a work permit, only a few thousand Syrians have obtained one up to now, and most of them work illegally for sub-standard wages.

fundamentally affect the ways in which these two groups manage their lives in the country. Although refugees have access to primary and secondary education, almost 350,000 Syrian children, making up 40% of the school-aged Syrian children, do not go to school in the country.⁴ Furthermore, despite new legislation passed in 2016 that enables Syrian refugees to apply for a work permit, only a few thousand Syrians have obtained one up to now, and most of them work illegally for sub-standard wages. There has been wide public support for the Syrian refugees, motivated by the sentiments of brotherhood and hospitality. Nevertheless, a growing number of people are becoming discontent with the presence of the refugees and with the performance of the government in managing the crisis.

The economic side effects of the massive refugee flows—Syrians' replacing Turkish laborers in low-paying jobs, the increasing human and material costs of the Syrian civil war, and a widespread myth that Syrians receive preferential services

and assistance from the state—have contributed to this disgruntlement. Intercommunal violence between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees increased threefold in the second half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016.5 The language barrier, income inequality,6 child labor problems, and growing xenophobia in the country further aggravate the interethnic tensions and urban violence.

These problems can be tackled only through the institution of state policies that will facilitate the cultural and economic integration of the refugee communities into Turkish society. Creating economic opportunities, introducing customized cultural and language training programs, and providing education for Syrian children, who constitute 46% of the overall Syrian population, are key to the success of the integration of the refugees. Nevertheless, successful integration depends not only on state policies and the society's level of inclusiveness, but also on the refugees' willingness to integrate.

⁴ http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-38674127

 $^{^5\,}https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/248-turkeys-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions$

⁶ While the minimum wage in the country is \$400, the average wage of a Syrian refugee is around \$150.

Most of the refugees are living outside the refugee camps, either in the suburbs of the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir or of the Southern border cities such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, and Sanliurfa. They are, in this respect, more like a new ethnic and socio-economic minority. The failure of state policies to integrate them can provoke the politicization and marginalization of the group and lead to inter-ethnic and classoriented grievances. Although they are often underestimated, the Syrian refugees have made important contributions to the Turkish economy by creating jobs and transferring their trade networks in recent years. One in three newly established foreign firms in Turkey is owned by a Syrian⁷.

Turkey has indisputably transformed into a country of immigration and refugee over time. However, an ever-increasing number of Turkish citizens are fleeing the country because of political persecution and human rights violations. Especially, the government crackdown on the Gulen movement, which intensified with the labeling of the movement as a terrorist organization after the July 15 coup attempt, caused to the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

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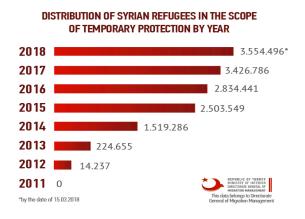
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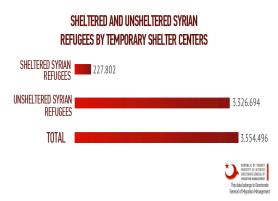
⁷ https://hbr.org/2017/04/turkey-badly-needs-a-long-term-plan-for-syrian-refugees

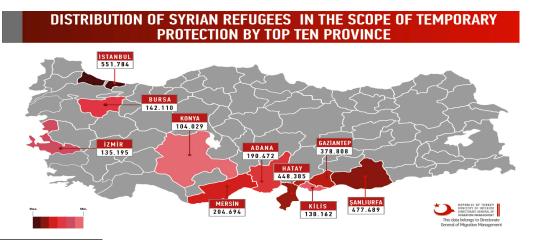
many followers of the movement have applied for asylum in the Western countries since the alleged coup attempt⁸. As a matter of fact, the Gulen Movement is not the first group of political refugees that the country has produced in its modern history. Many people faced political persecution after the military coups in 1970s and 80s applied for political asylum in different countries.

In conclusion, uprootedness is an exceptionally tragic and traumatic human experience. Turkey has been extremely resilient in the management of the Syrian refugee flows, and Syrian refugees are

secure from the fear of persecution in Turkey now. However, they are still confronted with the difficulties of navigating in an environment culturally, linguistically, and economically different than their own. In this regard, the integrationist policies of the state, positive attitudes on the part of the public, and the willingness of refugees to integrate into the new society will be critical. The statistics presented below were taken from the website of the Directorate General of Migration of Turkey. They provide important information on the Syrian refugees residing in Turkey.







⁸ https://www.ocregister.com/2016/08/22/irvines-new-arrivals-turkish-asylum-seekers-after-a-failed-coup-and-a-sadly-successful-purge/, http://irbcisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=456718

DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE SCOPE OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY PROVINCE

PROVINCE No	PROVINCE TOTAL	ON OF SYRIAL REGISTRETED	POPULATION 80.810.525	N THE SCOPE OF TO COMPARASION PERCENTAGE WITH PROVINCE POPULATION 4.40%	PROVINCE	PROTECTION BY P PROVINCE TOTAL	REGISTRETED 3.554.496	03.2018 (ALP) POPULATION 80.810.525	HABETICAL) COMPARASION PERCENTAGE WITH PROVINCE POPULATION 4.40%										
										1	ADANA	190.472	2.216.475	%8,59	42	KAHRAMANMARAŞ	100.226	1.127.623	%8,89
										2	ADIYAMAN	29.522	615.076	%4,80	43	KARABÜK	721	244.453	%0,29
3	AFYONKARAHİSAR	5.916	715.693	%0,83	44	KARAMAN	717	246.672	%0,29										
4	AĞRI	1.125	536.285	%0,21	45	KARS	226	287.654	%0,08										
5	AKSARAY	2.530	402.404	%0,63	46	KASTAMONU	1.348	372.373	%0,36										
6	AMASYA	569	329.888	%0,17	47	KAYSERİ	72.433	1.376.722	%5,26										
7	ANKARA	95.713	5.445.026	%1,76	48	KIRIKKALE	1.226	278.749	%0,44										
8	ANTALYA	677	2.364.396	%0,03	49	KIRKLARELİ	2.375	356.050	%0,67										
9	ARDAHAN	151	97.096	%0,16	50	KIRŞEHİR	1.206	234.529	%0,51										
10	ARTVÍN	59	166.143	%0,04	51	KILIS	130.162	136.319	%95,48										
11	AYDIN	10.759	1.080.839	%1,00	52	KOCAELİ	50.540	1.883.270	%2,68										
12	BALIKESİR	4.129	1.204.824	%0,34	53	KONYA	104.029	2.180.149	%4,77										
13	BARTIN	78	193.577	%0,04	54	KÜTAHYA	756	572.256	%0,13										
14	BATMAN	21.144	585.252	%3,61	55	MALATYA	29.966	786.676	%3,81										
15	BAYBURT	52	80.417	%0,06	56	MANİSA	10.815	1.413.041	%0,77										
16	BİLECİK	651	221.693	%0,29	57	MARDÍN	92.764	809.719	%11,46										
17	BİNGÖL	953	273.354	%0,35	58	MERSIN	204.694	1.793.931	%11,41										
18	BITLIS	912	341.474	%0,27	59	MUĞLA	13.200	938.751	%1,41										
19	BOLU	1.966	303.184	%0,65	60	MUŞ	1.328	404.544	%0,33										
20	BURDUR	8.476	264.779	%3,20	61	NEVŞEHİR	8.683	292.365	%2,97										
21	BURSA	142.110	2.936.803	%4,84	62	NİĞDE	4.908	352.727	%1,39										
22	ÇANAKKALE	4.732	530.417	%0,89	63	ORDU	825	742.341	%0,11										
23	ÇANKIRI	529	186.074	%0,28	64	OSMANİYE	53.629	527.724	%10,16										
24	ÇORUM	2.708	528.422	%0,51	65	RİZE	918	331.041	%0,28										
25	DENİZLİ	11.449	1.018.735	%1,12	66	SAKARYA	13.061	990.214	%1,32										
26	DİYARBAKIR	32.681	1.699.901	%1,92	67	SAMSUN	5.723	1.312.990	%0,44										
27	DÜZCE	1.247	377.610	%0,33	68	SIIRT	4.502	324.394	%1,39										
28	EDİRNE	6.523	406.855	%1,60	69	SINOP	128	207.427	%0,06										
29	ELAZIĞ	10.616	583.671	%1,82	70	SİVAS	4.325	621.301	%0,70										
30	ERZÍNCAN	170	231.511	%0,07	71	ŞANLIURFA	477.489	1.985.753	%24,05										
31	ERZURUM	1.000	760.476	%0,13	72	ŞIRNAK	14.869	503.236	%2,95										
32	ESKİŞEHİR	3.991	860.620	%0,46	73	TEKİRDAĞ	9.786	1.005.463	%0,97										
33	GAZÍANTEP	373.808	2.005.515	%18,64	74	TOKAT	1.090	602.086	%0,18										
34	GİRESUN	173	437.393	%0,04	75	TRABZON	2.994	786.326	%0,38										
35	GÜMÜŞHANE	92	170.173	%0,05	76	TUNCELİ	91	82.498	%0,11										
36	HAKKARİ	8.486	275.761	%3,08	77	UŞAK	2.380	364.971	%0,65										
37	HATAY	448.385	1.575.226	%28,46	78	VAN	2.903	1.106.891	%0,26										
38	IĞDIR	120	194.775	%0,06	79	YALOVA	3.785	251.203	%1,51										
39	ISPARTA	7.100	433.830	%1,64	80	YOZGAT	4.466	418.650	%1,07										
40	İSTANBUL	551.784	15.029.231	%3,67	81	ZONGULDAK	455	596.892	%0,08										
41	İZMİR	135.195	4.279.677	%3,16															



DISTRIBUTION BY AGE AND GENDER OF REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES RECORDED BY TAKING BIOMETRIC DATA

AGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
TOTAL	1.927.291	1.627.205	3.554.496
0-4	247.016	230.522	477.538
5-9	247.322	231.857	479.179
10-14	197.110	181.764	378.874
15-18	158.814	128.980	287.794
19-24	317.126	226.229	543.355
25-29	199.586	144.897	344.483
30-34	167.353	124.826	292.179
35-39	117.698	92.876	210.574
40-44	78.950	71.264	150.214
45-49	59.593	55.444	115.037
50-54	48.101	45.988	94.089
55-59	32.225	32.193	64.418
60-64	23.228	23.800	47.028
65-69	15.083	15.227	30.310
70-74	8.409	9.353	17.762
75-79	4.797	5.769	10.566
80-84	2.707	3.480	6.187
85-89	1.425	1.766	3.191
90+	748	970	1.718

by the date of 15.03.2018



DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE SCOPE OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY TEMPORARY SHELTER CENTERS

TEMPORARY SHELTER CENTERS	TOTAL
ŞANLIURFA	81.270
GAZÍANTEP	23.994
KİLİS	25.101
KAHRAMANMARAŞ	17.135
MARDÍN	2.714
НАТАУ	17.425
ADANA	26.981
ADIYAMAN	9.067
OSMANİYE	14.668
MALATYA	9.447
TOTAL	227.802
UNSHELTERED SYRIAN REFUGEE POPULATION BY CENTERS	3.326.694
TOTAL SYRIAN REFUGEE POPULATION IN COUNTRY	3.554.496

by the date of 15.03.2018



STATISTICAL DATA RELATED TO SYRIAN REFUGEE WHO LEFT COUNTRY IN THE SCOPE OF ONE TO ONE POLICY

COUNTRY	TOTAL
GERMANY	4.480
HOLLAND	2.609
FRANCE	1.399
FINLAND	1.002
BELGIUM	823
SWEDEN	742
SPAIN	429
ITALY	332
AUSTRIA	213
LUXEMBOUG	206
PORTUGAL	123
LITHUANIA	84
LATVIA	76
CROATIA	59
ESTONIA	46
MALTA	17
GRAND TOTAL	12.640

by the date of 15.03.2018



RELOCATION OF SYRIANS FOR THE 3RD COUNTRIES WITHIN 2014-2018

R.N.	COUNTRY	DEPARTING PERSONS	
1	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	3.900	
2	AUSTRALIA	91	
3	AUSTRIA	58	
4	BELGIUM	46	
5	FRANCE	1	
6	THE NETHERLANDS	3	
7	ENGLAND	1.685	
8	SWEDEN	168	
9	ICELAND	13	
10	CANADA (UNCHR)	3.454	
11	CANADA (DIRECT)	2.645	
12	LIECHTENSTEIN	18	
13	LUXEMBOURG	46	
14	NORWAY	1.573	
15	ROMANIA	43	
	TOTAL	13.744	

