

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY: BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND SEEKING NEW WAYS THROUGH MEDITERRANEAN

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Abstract

The conflict in Syria soon turned into a civil war. Over the seven years, civil war in Syria has displaced more than one third of the country. According to official figures of Turkish authorities, around three and a half million Syrian refugees are living safely behind the borders of the Republic of Turkey. Besides, Turkey has long been a bridge between the immigrant countries and the immigrant-host countries in Europe due to its central location. Migration further from Turkey to the EU countries entails refugees to choose a dangerous path, such as the Eastern Mediterranean Route. This paper analyze and to probe into the reasons behind Syrians' westward movement from Turkey.

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, refugee, migration, IDPs.

Introduction

The conflict in Syria between the Syrian regime and the opposition groups which began in March 2011 and turned into a civil war has become an issue affecting all the neighbor countries and even reaching up to Europe due to its suddenly increased intensity and size. Over the seven years, forced migration from Syria began moving mainly towards Turkey and such other countries as Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Due to the non-visa agreement which was signed in 2009 between the two countries, Turkey applied an open door policy and immediately started to set up temporary housing facilities in the bordering provinces. Hence, the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis has emerged.

There is a 900 km-long borderline between Syria and Turkey. Millions of Syrians with or without passports spread to Turkey legally or illegally. First, they continued their lives at their own expense then with the help of the Turkish government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As it was noted by Antonio Guterres, then the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees, the Syrian refugee crisis was the worst crisis since the Rwandan refugee crisis of 1994.

Civil war in Syria has displaced more than one third of Syrians. According to official figures of Turkish authorities, around three and a half million Syrian refugees are living safely behind the borders of the Republic of Turkey. The still on-going Syrian war and the destroyed living areas suggest that the Syrians who took refuge in Turkey are unlikely to return to their own country for a long time, if they can ever.

Turkey has long been a bridge between the immigrant countries and the immigrant-host countries in Europe due to its location. Especially with the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Turkey has become a destination for the immigrants, as well as a transit country for those asylum-seekers who were heading to Europe. But in the last three years, many refugees have attempted to leave

Turkey to a European country via either sea or land. Those who want to reach Europe are in need of international protection and seek better lives. The current status reflects that most common nationalities are Syrian who try to reach Europe from Turkey by sea. Further migration from Turkey to EU countries forces refugees to choose a more dangerous path, such as the Eastern Mediterranean Route.

The important point to understand here is why Refugees (especially Syrians) want to migrate from Turkey to Europe. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and to probe into the reasons behind this westward movement of the refugees from Turkey and to discuss what the Turkish government can and should do in the period ahead, and how to prevent people smugglers from increasing and the migration movement during the integration process of Syrians based on this critical subject.

Turkey's new social problem: Syrian Guests or Syrian citizens?

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

The conflict in Syria soon turned into a civil war. The country was displaced by forcing half of the population into both, internal and external migration. The largest influx of displaced Syrians has been into Turkey. According to the UNHCR, 3.5 million people are registered as a refugee in Turkey of which almost one million are between the age of 5 and 17, all school-aged children.¹

There are 22 shelter centers in Turkey's 10 provinces and more than 270.000 Syrians live in these camps which are officially called Temporary Accommodation Centers that the majority of them are located close to the Syrian border. Syrian refugees were settled in camps in 2012 and 2013. Nevertheless, in 2014, the camps' capacity was insufficient to deal with the massive flux of refugees. Therefore,

¹ UNHCR, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>. Accessed: 13 July 2018.

many of the refugees were spread out across Turkey's provinces according to their own preferences mainly border provinces such as Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Hatay, Adana, Mersin and Kilis.² The most important point which needs to be especially considered regarding the refugee expands living outside camps is their interaction with local people. This interaction carries with it social implications.

When Turkey opened its doors for the Syrian asylum seekers in 2011 and provided assistance and temporary protection for them in expectation that the crisis would be resolved quickly and then the asylum seekers would be able to return back to their home country. However, the crisis which was expected to end in a short time has become because of the reality of destruction to their homeland. Contrary to the expectations as the time went by the war in Syria drag down and is still in progress period peace was not likely to appear in the near future and all these complications have made the Syrians' return quite unlikely.

Upon arriving to Turkey for the first time, they stayed together with their families and acquaintances, friend or relatives, but after they find working opportunities they search for a place to live. Refugees not having any relatives or acquaintances take refuge in places like bus terminals, mosques, parks, or, they try to live in over-crowded rented rooms under difficult conditions. Those who work below poverty level conditions have difficulty in providing the necessary living standards.

Syrians who have taken refuge in Turkey thinking to stay in Turkey temporarily were obligated to work as they run out of money due to the prolongation of their duration. It is known that the Syrians living in cities are working illegally for meagre wages. The survey conducted by AFAD in 2013 reflected that three-

² Sukru Erdem, Gulden Boluk. "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: between Heaven and Hell?", IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook, 2016.
http://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/anuari/med.2016/IEMed_MedYearBook2016_Syrian%20Refugges%20Turkey_Baluk_Erdeum.pdf. Accessed: 15 July 2018.

quarters of those living outside camps were looking for work during certain periods.³ Nonetheless, work permission was given to the Syrians in accordance with the regulations signed by the Council of Ministers and came into effect on January 11, 2016. Syrian citizens can apply for work permission 6 months after they receive their temporary protection identity documents. Fewer than 0.1% of Syrians in Turkey currently are eligible to gain the right to work under Turkish labour laws.⁴ Even so, most Syrians have not applied for work permission due to the prospect of temporarily staying in Turkey.

Overview of Migration Policy in Turkey

Since 1951 efforts has been made in Turkey on migration issue, but this issue has started to gain importance only after masses of refugees started to immigrate to Turkey as a result of the events in Syria.

Turkey was one of the signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and signed its 1967 Protocol with ‘geographical limitations.’ Accordingly, instead of the general definition of the Geneva Convention, Turkey accepted only the asylum seekers coming from the European countries (in other words from the countries which are the members of the European Council) as “refugees” while the other people coming from outside of the European countries were defined as “asylum seekers”. The 1994 Asylum Regulation was purposed at embracing the UNHCR’s refugee status criteria. As of October 2011, the Syrians were adopted under the umbrella of temporary protection of Article 10 in the Migration and Asylum Regulation issued by the Ministry of Interior in 1994. Then the Syrians were protected temporarily with the No 62 Directive on “Acceptance and Hosting of the Citizens of

³ AFAD, Syrian refugees in Turkey, 2013 Field Research (Ankara: 2013), page 10.

⁴ “Fewer than 0.1% of Syrians in Turkey in line for work permits”, 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/11/fewer-than-01-of-syrians-in-turkey-in-line-for-work-permits>.

the Syrian Arab Republic and the Stateless people living in Syrian Arab Republic who entered Turkey in order to seek asylum collectively". This directive, dated 30 March 2012, was the first legislation for the plight of the Syrians. After the Law on Foreigners and International Protection entered into force on 12 April 2014, the Syrians gained temporary protection status officially through the Temporary Protection Directive adopted in October 2014.

Work permit arranged in "Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees under Temporary Protection" can only be granted to "refugees under temporary protection" who are described in the "Article 91 of Law on Foreigners And International Protection" and in the "Article 7 of Regulation on Temporary Protection". A people who forced to leave their country cannot return to the country they have left or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection.⁵

Why do not some Syrian refugees stay in Turkey?

The standards of the Turkish camps are quite high. Despite all the services provided, it is hard to say that Syrians living within the camps are immune to problems. Refugees are dissatisfied of doing every day routine things within a certain area. Beside the monotony, limited entry and exit opportunities make them feel that their freedom is limited. Therefore, it is more difficult to cope with the emotional impact and psychological needs of the refugee than to offer them different services. Although many social activities were implemented to respond these needs, refugees still seem to be suffering from the triviality of camp life.⁶ For this reason, it is preferred to live outside the camps despite the risks it incurs. It is imperative for their humanity that the standard level of these

⁵ "Regulation on the employment of temporary protection holders in Turkey", <https://www.expatguideturkey.com/regulation-on-the-employment-of-temporary-protection-holders-in-turkey/>. Accessed: 10 July 2018.

⁶ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/turkey/news/news/2017/03/helping-syrians-cope-with-depression>.

camps be very high if not unique. But, it was revealed by a research that there was not a direct causal relationship between the standard of living in the camps and the level of satisfaction of the refugees.⁷

A field research conducted in 2013 by DEMP⁸ indicated that access of Syrians living within the camps to medical and health services was much better compared to those living outside these camps. Among the Syrian asylum seekers who live outside these camps, only very few people have access to health services which is related to the fact that they need to be registered first, any Turkish hospital.⁹

In terms of the fact that more than 50 % of the Syrian refugee population is composed of children and young people under the age of 18 is one of the most important issues experienced by the Syrians is the lack of education. The situation leading to major problems in medium and long term manifests itself in the problem of access to education. The UNHCR reported that 40 % of Syrian children and youth living in Turkey did not attend school.¹⁰ This rate is quite alarming and the lack of education should be prevented in the most expedient manner.

The Syrian women living within or without the camps are at risk to sexual abuse. No doubt especially unregistered women and children who are living outside the camps are under heightened

⁷ Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), "The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighbouring Countries: Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" Ankara: 2014.

http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/enUploads/Article/Files/201452_189ing.pdf.
Accessed: 11 July 2018.

⁸ The Turkish Directorate General for Migration on Management, Ankara

⁹ Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), "The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighbouring Countries: Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" Ankara: 2014.

http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/enUploads/Article/Files/201452_189ing.pdf.
Accessed: 11 July 2018.

¹⁰ UNHCR, Updating Related to Turkey Education, February 2017.

<<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/53953>> Accessed 15 July 2018.

risk. Due to the fact that research has not been conducted on this issue owing to the sensitivity of the issue and reliable data could not be obtained. The issue which is on the agenda regarding the issue of abuse is that Syrian women aged between 11 and 20 married Turkish men older than 50 as a second, third or even as a fourth wife under the pretext of “religious ceremony”, which is not allowed by Turkish Civil Code. This perception spread as a sensation by word of mouth can easily be camouflaged as being passed-off as “humanity” such as helping to those fleeing.¹¹

Many of refugees think they will have better access to education, rebuilding their lives, find more respectful jobs and living with security when they reach Europe. As time goes on, things often get worse for the refugees, rather than better.

Emerging Routes for a New Homeland

The number of refugees and migrants arriving by sea to Europe increased in recent years. As of 2000, it is estimated that 37,000 people have lost their lives in their efforts to reach Europe and more than 60,000 migrants have died globally.¹² Migrant routes to Europe so far identified by Frontex and other sources are: Western Balkan Routes, Eastern Balkan Routes, Western African Routes, The Circular Route from Albania to Greece, Eastern Borders and the more important routes such as, Western Mediterranean Routes from North Africa to Spain, Eastern Mediterranean Routes from Turkey to Greece, Central Mediterranean Routes from North Africa to Italy.¹³

¹¹ Mazlumder, “Refugee Report of the Syrian women living outside the camps” (Ankara: May 2014): p.p 31.

<http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/m/a/mazlumder-kamp-disinda-yasayan-suriyeli-kadin-siginmacilar-raporu.pdf>. Accessed: 14 July 2018.

¹² Migration Data Portal, “Migrant deaths and disappearances”, <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migrant-deaths-and-disappearances>. Accessed: 10 July 2018.

¹³ Migratory Routes Map, <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-map/>. Accessed: 13 July 2018.

The Eastern Mediterranean Route has been the most common entry for the dislocated migration to the EU. Despite the short distance between Turkey and Greece, which include children, most of them try to find international relief in EU. The boat trip from Turkey to Greece is more safety than Libya and Italy and Italian coast are dangerous than other coasts that one million people coming to the EU through Turkey. Closure of the Balkan Route caused most of the refugees to use the Eastern Mediterranean Route again till EU- Turkey Statement.

In 2017, 172.301 people came by sea, among whom 3.193 died or went missing. The number included 36 % children, 23 % women and 41% men.¹⁴ 41.720 refugees arrived in the EU via Eastern Mediterranean route in 2017. This is a 77 % decline compared to 2016.¹⁵

In the first half of the 2018, most refugees and migrants arrived in Europe via Greece where some 22,000 arrivals by land and sea were reported to the end of June. As of 2014, the total number of arrivals from Turkey to the Greece was 1.100.929 indicated an average daily arrival of 127 persons.¹⁶

In the eastern Mediterranean, of those who trying to enter Europe from Turkey, the Turkish Coast Guard had rescued some 15.100 refugees and migrants as of the end of July this year compared to 9.400 in the same period in 2017.¹⁷ As the conflict in

¹⁴ UNHCR, <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>. Accessed: 13 July 2018.

¹⁵ The European Council, "Infographic - Migration flows: Eastern Mediterranean route", <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/irregular-arrivals-greece-06-2017/>. Accessed: 13 July 2018.

¹⁶ "Turkish Coast Guard helps migrants stranded on rocks in dramatic rescue in Aegean", <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2017/12/14/turkish-coast-guard-helps-migrants-stranded-on-rocks-in-dramatic-rescue-in-aegean>. Accessed: 15 July 2018.

¹⁷ Frontex, The role of Frontex in European Coast Guard Functions, https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/european_coast_guard_functions.pdf. Accessed: 16 July 2018.

Syria continues to displace civilians, Syrians are still the largest group entering Greece monthly traversing this route.

According to UNHCR reports, 1.564 migrants and refugees had been readmitted to Turkey from Greece between 2016 and 2018 and there were 9.324 persons that have been resettled mainly to Germany, France, the Netherlands and Finland from Turkey. Germany took in 4.313, France 1.401, the Netherland 2.608 and Finland 1.002 Syrian refugees.¹⁸

The difference between 2015 and 2018 basically caused EU states to up sea border controls and NATO patrolling vessels according to the EU-Turkey deal. The EU states attempted to collaborate with Turkey in the EU-Turkey agreement. During the course of 2016, the situation showed a decrease in crossings from Turkey to Greece, but observed an increase in crossings via the Central Mediterranean route. With the March 18 agreement between the EU and Turkey and the closure of the Western Balkan Route, the Central Mediterranean route again became the most important entry portal to Europe.

EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan and Agreement

In 2015, Europe for the first time in its modern history, received a mass influx of refugees from outside the European Continent. Throughout the year, more than one million irregular migrants arrived in the EU. Most were fleeing civil war in the Middle East; about half were Syrians. Humanitarian concern fed by the image of Alan Kurdi, who had died at sea and washed up on a Turkish beach, led to Germany announcing it would accept all asylum seekers. Although sea arrivals in Europe have fallen dramatically since Alan Kurdi's death, debates around this issue has raised, and grown ever

¹⁸ "The EU-Turkey refugee agreement: A review", <https://www.dw.com/en/the-eu-turkey-refugee-agreement-a-review/a-43028295>. Accessed: 13 July 2018.

more divided.¹⁹ The worsening situation indicated the necessity to reach a deal with Turkey.

The EU secured a deal with Turkey to stem irregular migration and stop the refugee flows within the framework of the EU-Turkey Action Plan signed in October 2015. The Implementation of Action Plan indicates important progress in fighting irregular migration.²⁰

The EU-Turkey deal came into force on 18 March 2016. The EU offered €3 billion and committed Turkish citizens visa liberalization to Schengen area. Turkey's long-stalled application to join the EU was fast-tracked. Turkey admitted to stopping asylum seekers from crossing by sea to the Greek islands in order to deal with the almost four million Syrian refugees who are living on Turkish soil. Syrian refugees who had reached the Greek islands were to be returned to Turkey, while Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey were to be resettled in the EU. Then refugees were to apply for EU relocation programs, they have been expected to be part of urgent relocation.

Two years after the EU-Turkey deal, 12.489 refugees have been resettled directly from Turkey to the EU, 1564 refugees were sent back to Turkey out of the around four million refugees hosted by Turkey. In comparison to 1700 in 2015, new arrivals to Greek islands daily diminished to 127 in 2018.²¹ After the EU-Turkey agreement, the Eastern Mediterranean Route closing Greece's northern borders which caused a domino effect resulting in the closing of the Slovenian and Croatian borders and the numbers of which has fallen. But never stops.

¹⁹ Steve Valdez Symonds, "It has been two years since Alan Kurdi's death – and things have only got worse for Syrian refugees", <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/syrian-refugees-libya-two-years-alan-kurdi-death-a7925616.html>. Accessed: 13 July 2018.

²⁰ EU-Turkey joint action plan, Brussels, 15 October 2015. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5860_en.htm. Accessed: 15 July 2018.

²¹ "The EU-Turkey refugee agreement: A review", <https://www.dw.com/en/the-eu-turkey-refugee-agreement-a-review/a-43028295>. Accessed: 15 July 2018.

As of now, it was realized that the EU-Turkey deal fails to stop refugee flow. Despite the EU-Turkey deal and the policing of the borders throughout Europe, the closure of the Balkan route has helped the smuggling initiative.²² For thousands of immigrants who crossed the border between Turkey and Greece the only alternative is to exit with the help of smugglers and buy fake passport from them. According to Greek police, arrests of refugees carrying counterfeit passports have gone up by about 230 percent since the closure of the Balkan route.²³ It encourages refugees who did not find any reason to stay in Turkey, to keep contact with smugglers. Most of the smugglers are Syrian owing to their relations and languages. But the actual facilitators of smuggling access points and the owners of the equipment are Turks.²⁴ They are not located only in Istanbul, the smuggling developed into an important industry in Izmir, Edirne and Ankara. The refugees, who want to find them, can do it easily. If refugees can't find a passage in Aksaray, a district of İstanbul, there are offers abound on the internet. Facebook groups arranged in Arabic advertise a wide array of such illegal services.

Conclusion: Recommendations to cope with challenges

Turkey had to abandon short-time policies and had to produce long-term and permanent policies and solutions for the Syrians hosted in Turkey. The most important of these policies are related to employment, health, education and their integration to social life. Turkey may only avoid the social unrest if it can make long-lasting improvements on these issues after preparing a suitable

²² "EU-Turkey deal fails to stop refugee flow", 4 April 2017.

<http://www.dw.com/en/eu-turkey-deal-fails-to-stop-refugee-flow/a-38282594>. Accessed: 17 July 2018.

²³ Fahrinisa Oswald, "Inside the world of human smuggling", 4 February 2017.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/world-human-smuggling-170123122824101.html>. Accessed: 18 July 2018.

²⁴ Yaser Allawi, "From Turkey to Europe – Q&A with a Smuggler", 29 March 2016.

<https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/community/2016/03/29/from-turkey-to-europe-qa-with-a-smuggler>. Accessed: 10 July 2018.

environment for the integration of the Syrians. Turkey needs an integration policy which can solve the crisis of rapidly increasing Syrian migration wisely and comprehensively.

The refugee children who are called the “lost generation of Syria” are prone to pitfalls such as committing crime or the disturbance of their social stability, along with the inability to contribute to the community in a positive way. This can only be prevented by education. After getting past the language barrier the continuity of their education should be ensured. This encouragement at an early age will facilitate this process especially in terms of language learning. Young people should receive complementary education from primarily school to the university in order to be able to keep up with their peers. The children who lag behind their peers in terms of education should be trained with intensive programs to compensate for lost time.

In terms of Turkey the use of the language suffers in areas other than the province of Gaziantep. Due to the fact that the Syrians do not speak Turkish they face problems not only in the integration to social life, but also in all social issues such as employment, education and access to health care. The majority of refugee children who were registered and started to attend state schools cannot keep pace with their education because they cannot speak Turkish. At this point Turkey should provide teachers and teaching resources which are the basis to ensure Syrians children and adults to acquire the Turkish language. Integration courses should be opened especially in the provinces where the presence of refugees is critical and these courses should be mandatory for appropriate participation. In these learning centers Turkish language lessons and orientation training should be provided systematically. With the help of this orientation training, asylum seekers should get acquainted with Turkish living conditions and they could be taught how to cope with everyday life without relying on a third person. After the opening of these courses the continuity of the Turkish education should be also encouraged.

Drafting of the "Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees under Temporary Protection" has been submitted for the approval of the Parliament in 2016. This law legalized the labor rights of the Syrians and aimed to reduce illegal employment to a minimum level through deterrent measures. But, in contrast to expectations, the law could not be implemented. An employer who wants to hire a refugee must prove that contribute to file tax reports, pay \$138 for the work permit, pay refugees at least the minimum wage and also no Turkish national is available. All of these matters seem to a disincentive. Turkey should improve the conditions of work permissions and facilitate the bureaucracy. Developing the work condition is a crucial step to hold the refugees in the country.

Developing the coexistence culture together should needs to evolve thus narrowing the gap between locals and refugees. Common cultural events should be set up such as sport competition, woman social activities, etc. Cultural integration is an integral cornerstone of a good integration policy. People need to be connected to the cultural, social, psychological, legal and economic structure of the country where they are living, with their own values based on equality and justice.

Turkey should improve dialogue with EU states and other regional countries toward making a deal which sets up migration flow and prevents increasing people smuggling. At the same time improving co-operation at the Greece-Turkey land border and coasts and by notifying partners in advance about policies or measures which impact them directly thus avoiding unilateral national entry conditions and fence constructions. Refugees' work permits should be provisional toward development. It would close off refugees to Europe, reduce the dangers of radicalization, and prohibit the exploitation of refugees as a source of cheap labor.

All saving operations should be accelerating and improving borders security. Private vessels should be controlled by police and boat migrants should be prevented to third countries where there

are risks of human rights abuses such as violation of the right to life. For applying in emergency time, humanitarian rescue operation should be created.

Turkey should apply of the human rights based approach in its border and migration policies, with European Countries which has a border to Turkey and which has a coast to Mediterranean should create new common migration policies.

The current situation on human smuggling has raised alarm between Turkey and Greece. Due to those smugglers taking migrants from Turkey to Greece. NATO vessels (Standing Maritime Group 2) at the Aegean Seas under German command patrol in coast and apprehend people who want to smuggle refugees. Turkey should implement its own maritime group and secure its coast.

The act of protecting vulnerable migrants from smugglers will have a large effect on the humanitarian mission for Turkey. It should take new regulatory measures such as restricted penalties toward criminals.

Turkey should support independent NGOs reporting and monitoring human rights conditions at border control operations. There should be created transparent mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of human rights and reporting violations and human rights considerations in preparation of its operations.

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