

REPORT

# TURKEY'S SYRIAN REFUGEES

## TOWARD INTEGRATION

KILIC BUGRA KANAT, KADIR USTUN





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SETA Publications 49  
First Published in 2015 by SETA  
ISBN: 978-605-4023-55-4

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Layout: Ümare Yazar  
Cover Photo: AFP

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Kilic Bugra Kanat, Kadir Ustun



SETA

SIYASET, EKONOMI VE TOPLUM ARASTIRMALARI VAKFI  
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH  
مركز الدراسات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank our colleagues at the SETA Foundation for supporting this project. We thank Sally Judson for conducting research for this project and editing an earlier version of the report. Grace Harter and Nathania Ustun also edited different versions. Umare Yazar has been very patient with us in designing and producing the report. We also thank Kemal Kirisci of the Brookings Institution for his valuable feedback of an earlier version. Needless to say, all shortcomings belong to us.

We owe special thanks go to Dogan Eskinat of AFAD for helping organize our research visit to Turkey, along with AFAD personnel in various cities who accommodated our busy schedule in a cold and snowy February. We thank all government officials and civil society representatives who gave their precious time to talk to us.



# INTRODUCTION

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The Syrian conflict has produced the most compelling humanitarian challenge of the 21st century. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there are 12.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance with 3.9 million who fled the country and 7.6 million internally displaced persons in Syria.<sup>1</sup> With no end to the conflict in sight, these numbers simply continue to rise and the obstacles to resolving the crisis remain out of reach. Syria's neighbors are under great pressure to host the refugees and most of them struggle to respond adequately. According to unofficial estimates, Turkey currently hosts around 2 million Syrian refugees who are, comparatively speaking, "better off" than refugees in other neighboring states. Turkey has done an exemplary job in hosting them and has received praise for its efforts by the international community.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Turkish government and civil society have demonstrated nothing short of a "Herculean" effort in providing for the Syrian refugees over the past four years. Nevertheless, there remain serious short-term and long-term challenges ahead in ensuring the well-being of the refugees in countries neighboring Syria. These more long-term impediments need to be addressed to contain the potential fall-out of the integration of Syrian refugees and

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1. Syria: Key Figures, *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, <http://www.unocha.org/syria>.

2. "European Parliament head praises Turkey for hosting Syrian refugees," *Anadolu News Agency*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/491265--european-parliament-head-praises-turkey-for-hosting-syrian-refugees>.

risk to social stability in neighboring countries with the ongoing conflict in Syria. The international community, for its part, needs to play a much more substantial role in helping Turkey and other neighbors of Syria in shouldering this enormous burden.

This report is the result of a four month long research project conducted in Washington DC and in Turkey. We conducted interviews with specialists in Washington DC and undertook a two-week long research trip to Istanbul, Ankara, Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Gaziantep. We visited several refugee camps and conducted interviews with government officials, civil society organizations, opposition activists, experts, and academics as well as refugees and Syrian NGOs. In this report, we provide an overview of the situation of refugees in Turkey and the difficulties that Turkey is facing in handling such a major crisis alongside of its Southern border. We also assess the policy implications of this crisis for Turkey and the international community. We discuss Turkey's open-door policy, the camp and non-camp refugees, the legal framework, integration, the international community's response, and the impact on Turkish foreign policy choices. We end the report with a series of policy recommendations that we hope will help cope with this monumental task at hand and contribute to a better coordination between Turkey and the international community.

# OPEN DOOR POLICY

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Since April 2011, Turkey has allowed Syrian refugees into the country based on the government's self-declared open door policy. While the Turkish government's initial response was based on short-term emergency planning with the goal of providing shelter and meals for the refugees, Turkey has since adjusted to the changing conditions on the ground, as the conflict prolonged and turned into a long-term protracted civil war. The changing nature of the conflict required revisiting Turkey's immigration policy and the parliament passed a comprehensive and progressive asylum and refugee bill in 2014.<sup>3</sup> Today in Turkey, the majority of Syrian refugees currently have temporary protection status. Turkey practices a non-refoulement policy and admits refugees fleeing the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

Turkey is maintaining the implementation of its open door policy toward the Syrian refugees, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, especially in the face of potential new waves of refugees. For instance, if Aleppo were to fall to the Syrian regime forces, Turkey could face as many as one million refugees heading north to the Turkish border.<sup>4</sup> Also, if ISIS enlarges the territory it controls, it

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3. Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu. (2013). *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, 28615, 11 Nisan 2013; For an unofficial translation of the law, see <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5167fbb20.html>; See also, Turkish Law on Protection of Foreigners Wins UN Praise, *UN News Centre*, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44637#.VSWHPUKBJv4>.

4. As of March 2015, there has been a stalemate in Aleppo and it is not clear how long the opposition forces can hold out. During our interviews in February, one opposition activist told us that the "things are fine right now but we do not know what might happen tomorrow." Interview, Gaziantep, February 25, 2015.



could result in yet another wave of refugees, similar to the scenario of September 2014.<sup>5</sup> Turkey will most likely accept more refugees, under the auspices of its open door policy, but it would further strain Turkey's capability to absorb them. New refugee waves would almost certainly put pressure on the existing resources available to the refugees in Turkey. The Turkish government has already spent more than 5 billion dollars to handle the humanitarian crisis on its southern border. Due to the economic crisis in Russia and the renewed security crisis in Iraq as well as the global economic slowdown, without the support of the international community it would be hard for Turkey as well as other refugee hosting countries to handle this ongoing humanitarian disaster. The financial and economic burden born by the host countries without sufficient assistance by the international community could jeopardize the economies of these countries. At that point, countries like Turkey could be forced to reevaluate its open door policy.

After the fall of several border crossings between Turkey and Syria to ISIS forces, Turkey closed several border gates. There are only three out of eight border crossings that remain open for commerce and humanitarian aid, but these are often closed intermittently. Border crossings are constantly monitored and opened and closed depending on the situation on the ground. Sometimes, refu-

5. "ISIS Forays Sends Waves of Refugees into Turkey," *New York Times*, September 21, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/22/world/europe/isis-forays-send-waves-of-refugees-into-turkey.html>

gees who want to return to Syria permanently or for a short period of time (to visit their houses, attend funerals, check on the elderly and the sick left behind)<sup>6</sup> create crowds at the gates. Authorities allow their passage for a couple of hours and then close the border again, once the accumulated crowd passes through. They adjust according to need on a daily basis. In Mardin, we were told that there was a movement of 300-400 people a day, some of whom go to Iraq to collect their salaries from the Iraqi government.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, despite the attempts of the security forces to crack down on smuggling networks, due to the length and absence of any geographic barrier, it seems to have become very difficult to stop illegal crossings. The Turkish government adopted several measures, including the compulsory registration of all refugees, to allow Syrians to access free healthcare and food assistance services. However, despite these security measures and financial and social incentives, there are still a handful of refugees that prefer to stay in the “gray zone” and avoid any form of registration with the authorities.<sup>8</sup> This situation is less prevalent in Turkey than other refugee receiving countries in the region; however, it is still an endemic problem that needs to be addressed in the long term.

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**“Turkey’s open door policy has its limits” but the Turkish government has not reversed this policy, recognizing that an end to this policy would be detrimental to civilian populations in need.**

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Camp refugees who decide to go back to Syria are required to sign a document in the presence of international observers expressing their intent to return home. Then, the authorities escort them to the border. However, if they decide to return to Turkey (having found that their village or town is not in a condition to return), they have to re-register at the border. Also, shifts in the fighting and security situation on the Syrian side of the border create incentives for some refugees to go back to their towns. For example, in February 2015, while we were conducting our interviews, much of ISIS’s advance was stopped. Many refugees wanted to return and the authorities facilitated their voluntary return back to Ko-

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6. Interview, Uşşaki Foundation Official, Gaziantep, February 24, 2015.

7. Interview, AFAD Official, Mardin, February 23, 2015.

8. Interview, General Director, General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM), February 28, 2015.

bani, mostly through the Murşitpınar crossing in Şanlıurfa.<sup>9</sup> In that sense, several border crossings remain flexible to allow for such movement across the border, as conditions change and the security situation improves. However, such returnees often find devastation back home even if the regime or ISIS forces may have left.<sup>10</sup>

While Turkey has had an open door policy toward the refugees since the start of the conflict, this policy has been modified as a result of the changing dynamics on the ground. Turkey is trying its best to facilitate the deliverance of humanitarian aid into Syria, but it may need to further tighten its controls especially if the advances by ISIS continue. Some reports at the end of March indicate that Turkey closed down all its border crossings<sup>11</sup> but this will likely be temporary.<sup>12</sup> An International Crisis Group noted, back in April 2013, that “Turkey’s open door policy has its limits”<sup>13</sup> but the Turkish government has not reversed this policy, recognizing that an end to this policy would be detrimental to civilian populations in need. Nevertheless, stabilization of border areas is critically important for Turkey’s ability to maintain its open door policy.

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9. “Syrians Slowly Return to Kobani after Kurds Win Back Border Town,” *Reuters*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/23/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kobani-idUSKBN0LR1AN20150223>

10. “Kobani refugees return home to ruin after ‘Islamic state’ defeat,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.dw.de/kobani-refugees-return-home-to-ruins-after-islamic-state-defeat/a-18275319>.

11. “Turkey moves to close all gates at border with Syria,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/europe/turkey-moves-to-close-all-gates-at-border-with-syria.html>.

12. Such occasional shut downs have occurred in the past. See “Turkey Shuts Border to Syria,” *CNN*, December 12, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/11/world/meast/syria-civil-war/>.

13. The Rising Costs of Turkey’s Syrian Quagmire, *International Crisis Group*, Report No: 230, April 30, 2014.



# REFUGEES IN THE CAMPS

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The Turkish Disaster Response Agency (AFAD) has been the lead agency in coordinating the government's efforts to respond to the refugee inflow. Although it was originally established in order to deal with disasters, such as earthquakes, the agency restructured itself in the immediate aftermath of the arrival of the first Syrian refugees and reorganized its local units in order to deal with the growing humanitarian disaster in Turkey's southern border. As an extremely well organized and dynamic organization, with the full financial and political support of the government, AFAD has ensured that the needs of the refugees have been met by utilizing the capabilities of various government agencies and ministries. AFAD also assumed the task of building refugee camps, the conditions of which are above and beyond the international standards set by the United Nations.<sup>14</sup>

While the agency deals with all sorts of disaster situations (earthquakes, floods, terrorism, chemical, cyber, etc.) around the globe (Myanmar, Serbia, Haiti, Chile, Somalia, and Libya), responding to the refugees has become the main focus of its activities over the past four years. The ability of the organization to rapidly and efficiently respond to the refugee crisis was seen during two recent developments in the region. During the Kobani crisis, in the face of an inflow of 183,000 refugees from Syria in a matter of three days, AFAD was on the ground

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14. Mac McClelland, "How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html?_r=0).



providing shelter, food, and humanitarian aid to those who escaped ISIS's attacks on Kobani. AFAD established a crisis center in the town bordering Kobani and set up a temporary camp for the refugees. It also started providing daily meals and assistance for those who preferred not to stay in the refugee camps. Later, AFAD established the biggest refugee camp in Suruç, the border town of Kobani, with the capacity to host 30,000 refugees. In a second crisis, immediately after ISIS's advance in Northern Iraq and the fall of Sinjar, AFAD was again providing assistance in Iraq and along the Turkish-Iraqi border. For instance, the organization built camps for the Yezidis in Iraq and in Turkey. As a result of these activities, AFAD has accumulated so much expertise that it is now recognized as one of the leading institutions in refugee issues and will host the World Humanitarian Summit next year in Antalya.

AFAD currently runs 25 camps in 10 cities with a total capacity of 330,000, housing approximately 272,000 refugees out of the 1,650,000 refugees that the agency has registered. The camps provide the refugees with accommodation, health, education (pre-school, school, and adult), religious, and social services. There are more than 150 different kinds of adult education programs (including training for how to become better community leaders) that have already produced around 50,000 graduates. AFAD ensures that each camp has doctors, teachers, and imams who are already civil servants working for the Turkish state. For instance, the Religious Affairs Administration appoints imams, the Agriculture

Ministry is responsible for organizing food deliveries, the Ministry of Education provides teachers, and local governors are responsible for the day-to-day running of the camps.

Government employees are assigned to camps from nearby towns and they receive the same salary that they would get in their own locality. This has fostered better relations between the refugees and the residents of nearby towns. In the refugee camps in Urfa and Mardin, most of the government employees can speak Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish. During our observation of the camps, we witnessed the effectiveness of this language advantage in managing daily operations. It is important to note that the Turkish government does not include the salaries of these civil servants in its calculations of the total cost of the refugees, which is 5.2 billion dollars (by UN standards). The administration of the camps was handled in a very professional manner with the joint efforts of the official administrators of the camps appointed by the government and the “community leaders” elected by the residents of the camps. All camps are divided into several sectors, each of which elects one of the refugees as the representative of that sector. These leaders are primary channels for camp residents to express their problems and views to management about the running of the camps. This joint administration has contributed to the relatively smooth functioning of the camps. The government also provides security personnel to protect the refugees and to prevent security problems in the camps. Most of the camps are protected externally by gendarmerie forces,<sup>15</sup> while the security inside the camps is provided through private Turkish security guards. Although there have not been any significant security problems within the camps so far, the camp administrators are extremely sensitive to the safety of the refugees and take every precaution to prevent any problems within the camps and surrounding areas. Due to the threat of fire or accidents, each camp also has a fire department with personnel ready to respond.

Some of the most significant problems in the camps occurred in the earlier phases of the conflict. At the beginning, many refugees assumed that the conflict would be short-lived and that they would soon be able to return to their country. Thus, it was difficult for many camp administrators to establish a working system in the camps. Once the refugees recognized that the conflict would be longer than they expected, they started to contribute to a more functioning order in

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15. Gendarmerie is generally tasked with security in rural areas in Turkey. They provided security services in some of the camps we visited.

the camps. Some refugees also thought that Western countries would grant them asylum to resettle in in the West.<sup>16</sup> Given that there is a large Syrian diaspora in Western countries, including the United States, many refugees have families or friends in the West. However, as the conflict went on and Western nations showed little or no interest in providing large-scale asylum for these refugees, the situation in the camps became more orderly.

In addition, some of the refugees in the earlier phases of the conflict assumed that the international community was funding the camps. They believed that international organizations provided an ample amount of aid through AFAD. When there were shortages of aid in Turkey during the worst days of the crisis, some refugees accused local authorities of not giving them everything that the UN and other international organizations had provided. This perception caused small riots in a few camps, but over time the refugees came to realize that it was the Turkish government that provided most of the resources in the camps. The misperception has been overcome to a large extent through a more conscious and sustained effort by camp officials and there seems to be a cordial relationship between the camp refugees and the authorities.<sup>17</sup> In our own arguably limited observations, “community leaders” and refugees had a positive relationship with the camp authorities.

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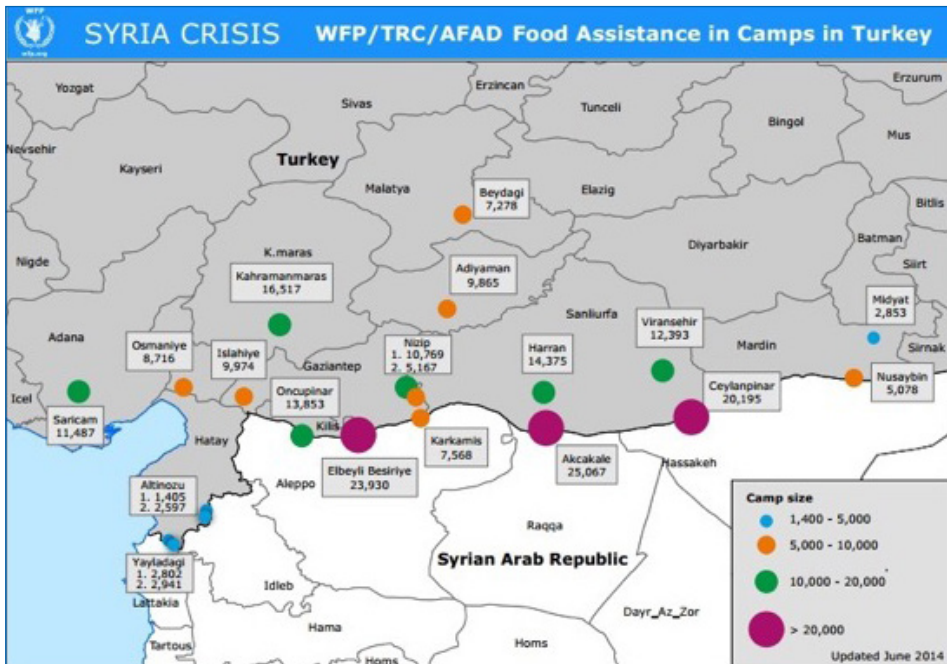
In the early phases of the conflict, another issue derived from cultural differences. For instance, the camps provided pre-made warm meals three times a day but the refugees were not happy, as they did not like Turkish food. However, this problem was resolved quickly through a practical solution. Now, AFAD partners with the World Food Program (WFP) to provide the refugees with vouchers that they can use to shop with at grocery stores in the camps.<sup>18</sup> However, the portion paid for by the WFP is subject to funding by the international community and

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16. Interview, AFAD Camp Official, Mardin, February 2015.

17. Interview, AFAD Camp Official, Mardin, February 2015.

18. They can also shop in the close by towns that they are able to visit during the 10 days that they are allowed to leave the camps.



it has stopped intermittently for lack of funds.<sup>19</sup> Vouchers allow larger families to pool their funds and feed themselves more cheaply compared to the families with fewer members.<sup>20</sup> The grocery stores are private enterprises and are set up in pairs run by different companies in a single camp to prevent a monopoly and offer somewhat competitive prices. In this way, the refugees are able to manage their own budget and shop according to their own taste and preferences. According to a more recent report, the Turkish Red Crescent plans to partner with the WFP to also distribute vouchers to refugees outside the camps.<sup>21</sup>

19. "WFP Forced to Suspend Syrian Refugee Food Assistance, Warns of Terrible Impact as Winter Nears," *World Food Programme News*, December 1, 2014, <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-forced-suspend-syrian-refugee-food-assistance-warns-terrible-impact-winter-nea>. During our research trip in February 2015, authorities told us that the WFP had just stopped releasing to them the funds. In these situations, the Turkish government makes up the difference.

20. Interview, AFAD Camp Official, Mardin, February 2015.

21. "Food Vouchers to be distributed to all Syrians in Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.dailysabah.com/nation/2015/04/09/food-vouchers-to-be-distributed-to-all-syrians-in-turkey>.



# NON-CAMP REFUGEES

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While the camps are well managed and resourced, the non-camp refugee population continues to experience significant problems that need to be addressed. In most of the countries that received refugees from Syria, there are a high number of refugees living outside of these camps. A small portion of these refugees are those with some savings who prefer to settle in large cities, including Istanbul, Mersin, Ankara, and Izmir. However, most refugees do not have sufficient resources and try to live in adjacent cities along the Turkish-Syrian border, such as Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep.<sup>22</sup> For the refugees living outside the camps, the most urgent issues are housing, food, education, health services, and employment. While housing, food, education, and health issues are related to capacity problems and bureaucratic hurdles, the employment issue is more about the legal framework and political sensitivity surrounding it.

Many non-camp refugees live in overcrowded housing arrangements under difficult conditions throughout the country. The increasing demand for housing in some of these cities has started to impact the local population. For instance, in Gaziantep, after the arrival of the Syrian refugees, housing prices increased dramatically due to the shortage of available residences. Although it also created a vibrant construction industry in the city, the initial increase in rent significantly impacted the local people. This hike in prices also puts the Syrian refugees in a

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22. Interview, AFAD Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.



more difficult situation, as they are seen as the cause of increasing housing costs.<sup>23</sup> In order to settle these non-camp refugees into better accommodations, a joint international enterprise seems to be necessary. Considering the high number of refugees outside the camps, not only in Turkey but also in Jordan and Lebanon, it would be unrealistic to expect the host countries to deal with these issues without the necessary international support.

The same problem can also be seen in healthcare. Although the government provides free healthcare for the refugees, the number of hospitals and doctors did not expand proportionally with the growing demand. As a result, hospitals and clinics throughout these cities struggle to respond to the increasing number of patients. When we talked with local people, they were understanding about the needs of the refugees and expected the health agencies around the world to establish more hospitals and clinics to provide necessary health services for the refugees.

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So far, civil society is very active in engaging these Syrian refugees and helping to provide food and clothing, as well as other kinds of aid. Some of the local NGOs have increased the extent of their operations and managed to respond to the needs of thousands of Syrian refugees in a very short period of time. These NGOs work closely with local businessmen and engage with large corporations and municipalities around Turkey.<sup>24</sup> They try to cover the basic needs of these refugees, such as clothing, in a very systematic way.

For example, one of the local NGOs provides warm meals six days a week for some 1,900 refugees in addition to funding for heating and hygiene among other needs. The foundation also provides clothing for the refugees allowing each refugee to have four visits a year to the clothing store of the foundation. During these visits, the refugees and their families are provided with necessary clothing

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23. Interview, local NGO worker, Gaziantep, February 2015.

24. "We asked for help from mayors and others outside Urfa; 167 truckloads of help came with the help of AK Party Istanbul branch," Interview, Urfa Platform Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.



and shoes for the season.<sup>25</sup> Some of these local NGOs provide daily hot meals for the refugees. In our interviews, despite their commitment, dedication, and hard work, some of the aid workers mentioned that the situation would be hard to sustain for their organizations and their donors if there is no solution to the conflict in Syria. There was an increasing concern among these representatives that another wave of refugees from Syria will not be easy to accommodate under these circumstances.

It should be noted that the civil society organizations' efforts could hardly be exaggerated, as they are assiduously working to ensure the refugees' needs are addressed. Some of the conservative-leaning NGOs viewed providing assistance to the refugees as "a moral duty" and mobilized the residents of these cities to be involved in these endeavors. In this sense, for the first time in many years, civil society in cities along the Syrian border is experiencing a high-level of mobilization. This prompted an increasing degree of public and governmental cooperation in helping the refugees. NGOs stated in several instances that there is close contact between government officials and these organizations. There are regular coordination meetings and in Şanlıurfa, NGOs established an umbrella group to better coordinate their activities and communicate with the government.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the scale of the work ahead is unprecedented despite the best efforts of the government and civil society, especially in the absence of substantial international help. While NGOs attend to their food, housing, and clothing needs, citizens organize among themselves at the community and neighborhood level to provide help as well. The more long-term solution would be to help refugees acquire skills and allow them to work so that they can sustain themselves and their families. As one NGO worker put it, "we need to teach them how to fish."<sup>27</sup>

## EDUCATION

It is estimated that around 30-35 percent of Syrian refugees in Turkey are school-age children. This amounts to around 550,000 children that need to be attending school.<sup>28</sup> While AFAD is providing education for children in 70 schools and

25. Interview, Uşşaki Foundation Official, Gaziantep, February 24, 2015.

26. Interview, Urfa Platform Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.

27. Interview, Uşşaki Foundation Official, Gaziantep, February 24, 2015.

28. These numbers may be underestimated, as UNICEF puts the percentage of children in need around 50 percent for Syria. Similar estimate for Turkey would not be surprising. UNICEF Syria Humanitarian Highlights and Results Situation Report, January 2015, <http://childrenofsyria.info/2015/03/12/unicef-syria-humanitarian-highlights-and-results-sitrep-jan-2015/>.

the Ministry of Education is offering it in approximately 75 locations outside the camps, the number of children receiving education is around 75,000 compared to the half a million that need it. It is simply not feasible to accommodate such a high number of school children in the national education institutions in the southeast of Turkey. This situation necessitates international engagement to provide schooling for these refugee children. Furthermore, education of girls remains a challenge, as the educators we interviewed remarked that Syrian refugee families were hesitant to send their girls to schools.<sup>29</sup> If those parents cannot be persuaded to send their children to school, establishing special institutions for female students should be considered.

Another significant issue to be considered is in regards to Turkish language education. Many refugees have already learned Turkish by taking advantage of language classes both inside and outside the camps, but this process appears too slow and has not taken off given that most of the refugees have been living in Turkey for several years now. In part, given the availability of multilingual people in these cities and the use of multiple languages, including Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic, many refugees did not feel the immediate urge to become proficient in Turkish. However, since the conflict in Syria is likely to continue for several years, it may be more practical for the refugees to learn Turkish to better integrate into Turkish society and find employment in different parts of the country, especially as they have received permission to work.

One of the most significant challenges in formulating integration policies is the education of Syrian refugee children. The Turkish public education system is based on a predominantly unilingual system that cannot readily offer language accommodations for Syrian children. At the local level, municipalities seem to have overcome this issue to a limited extent by offering classes in Arabic and Kurdish, Turkish language classes, and vocational training courses for children as well as for adults. They are also helping to build and run "Syrian schools" but funding for the salaries of the teachers was yet another difficulty.<sup>30</sup> In the camps, AFAD facilitates the education of children<sup>31</sup> while UNICEF is also providing school supplies among other kinds of help.<sup>32</sup> Overall, the majority of the school age children are

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29. Interview, AFAD Camp Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.

30. Interview, Urfa Platform Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.

31. Interview, President of AFAD, Ankara, February 2015.

32. Humanitarian Action for Children: Syrian Refugees 2015, UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/appeals/syrian-refugees.html>.

outside schools, and despite the efforts of various government, international and civil society organizations, education remains the most important challenge for the refugees in Turkey.

When the education of Syrian refugees was discussed during our meetings with civil society organizations, one major trend was highlighted, which is the “brain drain” of the Syrian refugees toward Europe starting as early as 2012. Many well-educated and better-trained refugees were able to immigrate to Europe (whose immigration laws give preferential treatment to professional immigrants), while Turkey was slow to adjust its immigration policies to incentivize them to stay in the country. However, it may not be too late for Turkey to implement policies to attract more educated and qualified Syrian refugees to stay and help their compatriots to chart a future for themselves closer to home, especially if returning to Syria one day becomes a true option for the majority of refugees. But again, such a policy needs to include a comprehensive education strategy designed for these refugees, including effective training, recruitment, and retention.

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It may not be too late for Turkey to implement policies to attract more educated and qualified Syrian refugees to stay and help their compatriots to chart a future for themselves closer to home.

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## HEALTH SERVICES

When it comes to health services, all registered refugees in Turkey are entitled to receive free healthcare services in the towns that they are registered. Their localities are designated in their refugee ID cards and they can only use this to access health services in their registered area. In border towns, where refugees reside in overwhelming numbers, there is a lot of pressure on hospitals and doctors. According to AFAD’s estimates, refugees have been provided approximately 6.5 million polyclinic services, including more than 200,000 operations and around 60,000 births. In towns like Kilis, whose population is about 96,000 and where the refugees number around 100,000, there is significant pressure on all sorts of services, especially health services. Similar to education services, public services in border cities are increasingly stretched thin as a result of the overflow of these refugees. To overcome this situation, prevent epidemics, and help the well-being

of these refugees, the international community needs to bolster its assistance in health services.

A significant problem in providing health services for refugees is related to the language barrier. While hospitals are accepting all registered refugees for treatment, the language barrier becomes an issue in many places, as there are often not enough translators. In cities like Şanlıurfa, where Arabic and Kurdish are more widely spoken, this is not such a big issue but in other cities, it results in a lack of communication between doctors and patients. Again, just like in the education field, this issue has the potential to create tension between local people

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There is an urgent need to ensure that qualified personnel, such as doctors and nurses, serve in Turkish hospitals and stay in Turkey instead of immigrating to Europe.

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and refugees. One imperfect solution is to draw on the Syrian refugees who were doctors back in Syria. These doctors are tested for their medical knowledge (as they often are unable to provide documentation of their credentials) and work in teams with Turkish doctors to provide health services. Legislation to allow work permits for such qualified professionals would make a big difference in the quality of health services and temporarily resolve the shortage of medical professionals. However, under current circumstances, even recruiting Syrian doctors can be challenging since many have already immigrated to Europe.<sup>33</sup> Western countries were also quick to accept these more educated refugees and provide them with the necessary working permits in their countries. There is an urgent need to ensure that qualified personnel, such as doctors and nurses, serve in Turkish hospitals and stay in Turkey instead of immigrating to Europe, where there is not as much need for Syrian health professionals.

One of the most immediate and potentially consequential steps that the government can take is to issue work permits for refugees. The Ministry of Labor has already prepared legislation to this effect, which would allow qualified individuals to work in certain sectors with various quotas. This plan is to be implemented in a phased manner so as not to disturb the “social peace” and generate tension

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33. Interview, NGO worker, Istanbul, February 2015.



between refugees and local people. While the legislation has been under way for months now, it seems that the upcoming June 2015 elections are delaying the passage of this piece of legislation. However, a carefully prepared piece of legislation could allow refugees to work legally (they are already working illegally in many sectors and the government has no choice but to turn a blind eye at this point) and prevent abuse. Low wages and unsafe working conditions create an environment ripe for exploitation. In certain industrial cities like Gaziantep, there is in fact a need for workers but large industrialists and business owners will not risk illegally hiring Syrian refugees.<sup>34</sup> If and when the legislation passes, there will be many businesses in industrial cities willing to employ Syrian refugees. This would not only allow the refugees to sustain themselves but also help the economy by integrating qualified Syrian workers into the workforce.

34. Interview, NGO worker, Gaziantep, February 2015.



# LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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In April 2013, Turkey's Parliament ratified the Law on Foreigners and International Protections, which established the General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM) under the Ministry of Interior. As the country's first asylum law, it seeks to integrate Turkey's immigration policy and address the refugee issue.<sup>35</sup> The law promises to adopt a human rights-oriented view of immigration and move away from the previous security-oriented approach.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the EU seems to be struggling with its security approach to immigration while Turkey is aiming to adopt a more humanitarian approach.<sup>37</sup>

The law is a legislative victory, as it was passed unanimously in the parliament. The legislation aims to manage immigration and asylum with most of it focused on the rights of the refugees, while only about 20 percent of the articles are focused on security issues. While the legislation was the subject of speculation and politically charged debates on whether citizenship was being given to the refugees, it was recognized in EU progress reports as a step in the right direction. Engagement of and input by civil society organizations as well as academics con-

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35. Rebecca Kilberg, "Turkey's Evolving Migration Identity," *Migration Information Source*, July 24, 2014, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/turkeys-evolving-migration-identity>.

36. Meral Acikgoz and Hakki Onur Ariner, "Turkey's New Law on Foreigners and International Protection: An Introduction," *Turkish Migration Studies Group*, Briefing Paper 2 (January 2014), [https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/files/Publications/Briefings/TurkMiS/Brief\\_2\\_Ariner\\_Acikgoz\\_2014.pdf](https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/files/Publications/Briefings/TurkMiS/Brief_2_Ariner_Acikgoz_2014.pdf).

37. Juliette Tolay, "The EU and Turkey's Asylum Policies in Light of the Syrian Crisis," *Global Turkey in Europe*, Policy Brief 10 (January 2014).

tributed to the successful passage of the law.<sup>38</sup> As is the case with all legislation, the real challenge comes at the implementation phase, the success of which will largely be determined by the performance of the GDMM in an otherwise politically charged area of law.

Over the past ten years, Turkey has transformed from being a transit country to a target country for immigrants. In the past several years, there has been an explosion in the number of asylum seekers not only from Syria, but also from countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Myanmar, among others. Since the capture of Mosul by ISIS, some 55,000 asylum applications have been filed. Approximately 22,000 Yezidis added to a total of 77,000 individual asylum seekers over the past six months. To handle these applications as well as to decide whether to give “temporary protection status” to a group of refugees, the newly established GDMM is working to register all refugees in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of “illegal networks” and human trafficking.

With many registration centers throughout the country, the authorities have tried hard to reach the refugees so that they can register and take advantage of the rights and services that they are entitled to by law. Registration efforts help them come out of the shadows and establish healthy relations with the authorities. It is important to note here that, according to the new legislation, Turkey has adopted the non-refoulement rule, which allows for a much safer legal environment for the refugees. Although refugees are often subject to misinformation and hesitate to register with the authorities, it seems that much progress has been made, as the number of registered refugees is close to 2 million.

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38. Interview, General Director, General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM), February 28, 2015.



# NEED FOR AN INTEGRATION STRATEGY

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Most analyses on Syrian refugees in Turkey acknowledge that the majority of the refugees will stay in the country in the long-term, even if the conflict stabilizes and returning to Syria becomes a real possibility.<sup>39</sup> Our fieldwork indicated a mix of views on whether the refugees would ever go back to Syria. While everyone agrees that they will not go back anytime soon, some humanitarian workers pointed to Turkey's past refugee experience, where most of the refugees from Chechnya, Iraq, and Bosnia returned to their countries.<sup>40</sup> However, in those situations, the wars ended definitively and the number of refugees was not comparable to today's almost 2 million Syrian refugees. A poll conducted in September 2014 indicated that an overwhelming majority of the refugees from Kobani said they intended to return home when security conditions improved,<sup>41</sup> but these views do not represent the entire refugee population and such views subsequently change depending on the course of the conflict. One local NGO worker noted that many refugees are now saying that even if the conflict ended soon, instability as in the example of Iraq will likely continue for years, which makes return less realistic.<sup>42</sup>

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39. Kemal Kirisci, "Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality," The Brookings Institution, May 2014.

40. Interview, IHH official, Istanbul, February 2015.

41. CARE International Rapid Assessment Report: Kobani Refugee Influx to Turkey, September 24, 2014, p.5.

42. Interview, NGO worker, Gaziantep, February 2015.

Especially along the border, when there have been improvements in the security situation, there are many refugees who try to go back to Syria, but these movements tend to be temporary and do not change the main dynamic, which are refugee inflows to Turkey. This dynamic will likely remain as long as there is fighting and violence. A often repeated point, as mentioned above, expressed by our interviewees is that the current situation in Iraq reminded many refugees that even if the war ended tomorrow, stability would not come immediately and perhaps not for years. These sentiments indicate that while a substantial number of refugees may choose to go back if conditions improve, just as many refugees may want to stay in Turkey, especially if they were able to support themselves and benefit from health and education services that are not available in Syria. For these reasons, we believe that a large portion of refugees will stay in Turkey in the long run even if the conditions in Syria improve. The Turkish government will need to come up with policies addressing long-term integration issues.

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Consequently, a variety of reports have urged the government of Turkey to begin thinking about long-term integration policies to avoid the pitfalls of social, economic, and security implications of hosting close to 2 million refugees.<sup>43</sup> The government, for its part, has started to consider legislation that would facilitate successful integration. The Labor Ministry, for instance, has already announced that the Syrian refugees would be permitted to work in certain jobs.<sup>44</sup> Most of the non-camp refugees are already working in a variety of industries, such as textile and agriculture, in many ways; the legislation is an effort to legalize an already existing reality. Legal work permits, as announced by the government, would help prevent the growth of an underground economy and exploitation of the refugee population. Through smart economic integration policies, refugees, who are often depicted as a financial burden, could in fact contribute to local economies, bene-

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43. ORSAM and TESEV, "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey," Report No. 195 (January 2015), <http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/09012015103629.pdf>.

44. Hacer Boyacioglu, "Suriyeli işçilere çalışma izni geliyor," *Hürriyet*, November 12, 2014. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/27560027.asp>.

fitting local businesses and investment.<sup>45</sup> Some of our interlocutors made the point that the Syrians are able to find work but there is often the danger of exploitation and lack of benefits in the work place.

Although the government has already prepared legislation to give work permits for refugees in certain sectors with quotas, the initiative has sparked backlash from segments of the Turkish population who believe that Syrians will take away their jobs. Especially at the beginning of the Syrian crisis, there were speculations and rumors that the ruling party would give citizenship to Syrians and allow them to vote in order to win elections.<sup>46</sup> Such perceptions are indicative of some of the political sensitivities surrounding the refugee issue in Turkey. The authorities need to work on devising a strategy to promote a positive agenda regarding the refugees. We have heard many positive stories about the common people's sacrifices and how they shared their resources with the refugees. However, there are also many negative views, which could complicate the feasibility of integration policies. Particularly in southern and southeastern towns, there is a perception among the general public that they have less access to health services because the refugees overburden the health care system. There is a need to increase capacity in addition to the need to better inform the Turkish public about the realities of the refugees' situation.<sup>47</sup> Any long-term integration policy has to have a public relations strategy built into it.

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45. ORSAM and TESEV, "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey," Report No. 195 (January 2015), <http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/09012015103629.pdf>, p.8.

46. "Turkish government to let Syrian refugees vote in elections, CHP claims," *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 24, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-government-to-let-syrian-refugees-vote-in-elections-chp-claims.aspx?pageID=238&nid=58449>.

47. ORSAM and TESEV, "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey," Report No. 195 (January 2015), <http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/09012015103629.pdf>, 35-37.



# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

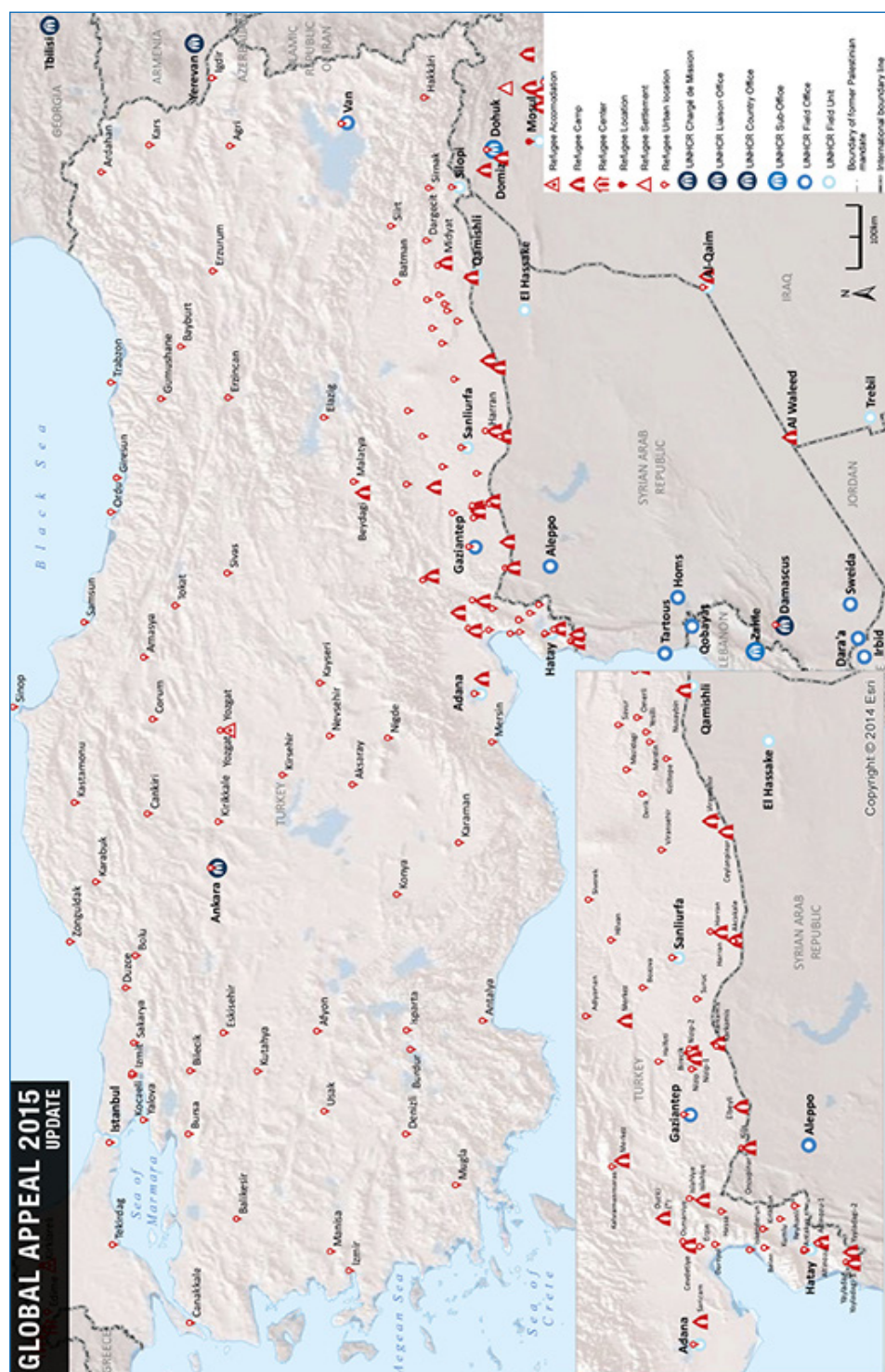
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In Turkey, there is a general dissatisfaction and disappointment with the international community's efforts to help in the country's refugee challenge. Both government officials and non-governmental organizations expressed a level of disillusionment and feeling that the role of the international community is irrelevant. They remarked that many of the foreign NGOs were focused on analysis and data collection instead of making a real difference in the daily lives of the refugees. Many organizations and delegations simply visit, interview, and write reports but "nothing happens."<sup>48</sup> This perception will likely remain the same, as the international community seems more focused on what it sees as the more "urgent" cases in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

To be fair, Turkey is much more capable of handling the refugees as it has a strong central government with institutions throughout the country. Turkey insisted on adopting a more humanitarian approach from the beginning. The Turkish government's response with its own resources has been exemplary. However, the international organizations complained, especially at the beginning, that they found the Turkish bureaucracy slow in giving them permits to work on the ground. This seems to have been largely overcome, as there are many international organizations working to assist Syrian refugees in Turkey. The government has assumed full responsibility from the beginning, which meant that UNHCR had a

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48. Interview, Urfa Platform Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.



more secondary role. In any case, UNHCR continues to struggle to meet the most basic needs of refugees and its appeals go severely underfunded.<sup>49</sup>

UNHCR remains the biggest organization representing the international community in Turkey.<sup>50</sup> It has a variety of projects and it cooperates with AFAD inside and outside the camps.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, UNICEF works on health, education, and psychosocial support for children.<sup>52</sup> While officials acknowledge some help by the international community through UNHCR and UNICEF,<sup>53</sup> the overwhelming view is that they are exceedingly insufficient. It should be noted that, in addition to the general disappointment about the international community's lack of sufficient support, there are also some misperceptions about international organizations' activities. A Syrian activist remarked that UNHCR "helped" the Assad regime by working in areas under regime control.<sup>54</sup> This indicates a level of misinformation about the agency's mandate but it is nevertheless important to note this negative perception. Elsewhere, we noted that many perceived UNHCR's work as insufficient and only a "drop in the bucket." One of our interviewees remarked that they were not asking the international community to help Turkey, but only that the international community shoulder their "fair share" of the burden.<sup>55</sup>

In February 2015, most of our interviewees indicated their fear that the potential fall of Aleppo could produce as many as a million additional refugees in Turkey. As of March 2015, Aleppo is sandwiched between regime forces and ISIS. It will be important for the international community to support the moderate opposition defending Aleppo to prevent another humanitarian tragedy in Aleppo. Turkey, judging by its policy so far, will most likely open its borders to incoming refugees, but the country's resources will be further burdened by the new inflow. Humanitarian workers on the ground made the point that the continuation of the war is the most important challenge for them, as it is producing ever more refugees.

49. UNHCR, "Syria Regional Refugee Response," March 26, 2015, [http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#\\_ga=1.59884452.888067983.1420443133](http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#_ga=1.59884452.888067983.1420443133).

50. "2014 UNHCR Country Operation Profile- Turkey," UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48e0fa7f&submit=GO>.

51. UNHCR's "Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-16: Turkey" is available here: <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/3RP-Report-Turkey-low-res.pdf>.

52. UNICEF, "Humanitarian Action for Children: Syrian Refugees," <http://www.unicef.org/appeals/syrianrefugees.html>.

53. "UNICEF sent mini fridges, heaters, tents, and helped build a prefabricated school in cooperation with AFAD, but these are not enough ... UN sent winter coats and inner liners and they worked quite well." Interview, AFAD Midyat Camp Official, February 2015.

54. Interview, Syrian activist/NGO leader, Istanbul, February 2015.

55. Interview, Government official, Ankara, February 2015.





# THE IMPACT OF REFUGEE CHALLENGE ON TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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The impact of the Syrian refugees on Turkish foreign policy can be summarized as a mixed bag of opportunities for capacity building and serious challenges limiting the country's policy choices. The Syrian conflict contributed to Turkey's capacity building through its humanitarian response efforts. Hosting unprecedented numbers of Syrian refugees forced Turkey to adopt a foreign policy line that was not only strategic and security-oriented, but also strongly humanitarian in nature. Turkey has had to address the challenges of the worsening humanitarian situation in Syria and modified its foreign policy steps accordingly.

In Turkey's view, the international community may be more outraged by ISIS's activities but in real practical terms, the Syrian regime has caused much more destruction for the country and produced many more refugees for neighboring countries. This is not a reason for a moral choice between ISIS and the Syrian regime, or PYD for that matter, but a fact Turkey is taking into consideration when making its foreign policy choices. Turkey has insisted that the U.S. should take on the Assad regime if an effective anti-ISIS coalition were to be established. To join the coalition in a military capacity, Turkey asked for a comprehensive strategy to end the crisis in Syria. While ISIS threatens international borders and the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria, which is a profoundly serious threat for Turkey as well, Turkey has been focused on alleviating the humanitarian burden of the conflict. In this sense, the Syrian conflict has blurred the line between formulating foreign policy and providing humanitarian aid for Turkey. Receiving a lot of feed-

back from the ground, Turkey's policy has been responsive to the developments in Syria even when the international attention was not particularly focused on Syria. As a result, the country's general knowledge and capacity have increased as a result of the exposure of its government agencies and civil society to conditions on the ground. This has led Turkey to insist on policies with a comprehensive strategy to address the conflict as a whole and the associated humanitarian challenges.

At the very early stages of the conflict when the refugee numbers were not very high, Turkey declined foreign aid and set out to address the refugee inflows on its own.<sup>56</sup> As the challenge grew, the country has made it much easier, by adjusting its difficult bureaucratic procedures, for foreign aid agencies to operate in Turkey. This has allowed foreign expertise and some sources of aid, albeit insufficient, to reach the refugees and help Turkey to some extent. In this sense, Turkey is now working much more closely with international organizations, which helps Turkish foreign policy to better incorporate international organizations into its humanitarian efforts. It also helps raise the awareness about the challenges Turkey faces and progress it has made. Working with international donors and organizations on the refugee crisis will help Turkish foreign policy in future missions in the region and around the world. This has increased the capacity of Turkish humanitarian response and the significance of non-governmental organizations' share in Turkish foreign policy. In the meantime, and partly due to the Syria crisis, Turkey has emerged as a top donor country in recent years and its humanitarian aid as a percentage of its GDP is among the highest in the world.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, Turkey passed legislation to better equip its bureaucratic structures to deal with the refugee challenge. This is not to discount the inefficiencies and unresponsiveness of the traditional bureaucracy<sup>58</sup> but to highlight the greater role played by the newly established agencies. The activities of AFAD have been commended by all. Further, the recognition that crisis response would not address the long-term challenges gave way to the creation of a new immigration authority, which will be able to approach refugee-related issues in a more comprehensive manner. Feedback from and statistics on the Syrian refugee situation will

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56. This has in fact created an excuse for international donors not to help Turkey as much as they have in Jordan and Lebanon. The Rising Costs of Turkey's Syrian Quagmire, *International Crisis Group*, Report No: 230, April 30, 2014.

57. "Turkey third largest international donor in humanitarian assistance," *Daily Sabah*, September 11, 2014, <http://www.dailysabah.com/nation/2014/09/11/turkey-third-largest-international-donor-in-humanitarian-assistance>.

58. Lamenting the Turkish bureaucracy's slow response, one NGO worker remarked, "We have yet to establish a clear guideline for the plate numbers for Syrian vehicles." Interview, NGO worker, Gaziantep, February 2015.

allow Turkish foreign policy makers to avoid certain mistakes in the future and handle refugee crises even better. Turkey will also be able to provide expertise and know-how to crises in other parts of the world, which will be an asset for Turkish foreign policy. The somewhat unintended consequence of the Syrian conflict for Turkey has been the push to institutionalize its humanitarian response and reform its bureaucratic structures in a way that will strengthen the country's capacity to tackle foreign policy challenges in the future.

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Unintended consequence of the Syrian conflict for Turkey has been the push to institutionalize its humanitarian response and reform its bureaucratic structures in a way that will strengthen the country's capacity to tackle foreign policy challenges in the future.

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However, the Syrian conflict also underscored the complexity of Turkey's foreign policy choices. Welcoming close to 2 million refugees precipitated significant burdens and serious security risks along the border with Syria. For instance, ISIS activities forced Turkey to reinforce its military presence along the border. At times, Turkey has responded to incursions from the Syrian side of the border. Moreover, smuggling activities by illegal networks were exacerbated in the context of a worsening civil war, challenging and complicating Turkey's open door policy.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, having to deal with the Syrian refugee influx has pushed Turkey to build its capacity to deal with humanitarian crises in its engagement with the refugees. There are now many humanitarian workers in Turkey who know the region much better and who speak the regional languages. They are also much more familiar with the issues on the ground that provide Turkish politicians with a much better grasp and a fuller picture of the situation. Nevertheless, border security issues limited Turkey's foreign policy choices by challenging its open door policy on multiple fronts.

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59. Sally Judson and Kadir Ustun, "Turkey's ISIS Challenge," SETADC Perspective (September 2014), <http://setadc.org/index.php/publications/seta-dc-perspectives/574-turkey-isis-challenge>.

Turkey maintained some camps beyond the border to prevent the flow of refugees with the so-called “zero-point delivery system.”<sup>60</sup> Since the Syrian regime did not allow international aid to enter the country until the UN Security Council passed a resolution in February 2014,<sup>61</sup> as of August 2012 Turkey developed a system to help the refugees before they reached Turkey.<sup>62</sup> Turkish trucks bring aid supplied by various NGOs and the Turkish Red Crescent to the border to be delivered to Syrian NGOs operating on the other side of the border. There has been, in fact, a de facto buffer zone along the border inside Syria that is out of the reach of the Syrian regime. This zone has been created partly as a result of Turkey’s altered rules of engagement with the Syrian air force after the downing of the Turkish F-4 reconnaissance jet in June 2012.<sup>63</sup>

There are refugee camps inside Iraq established by AFAD and sustained by the humanitarian activities of Turkish civil society organizations. These refugee camps are established by AFAD and are being run by the Kurdish Regional Government. After the rise of ISIS, around one million Iraqis were displaced; consequently, Turkey decided to stem the flow of refugees by increasing the number of camps in northern Iraq. In August 2014, AFAD established a tent refugee camp in Zakho to care for 16,000 Yazidis who fled ISIS.<sup>64</sup> Turkey has also set up another camp in Dohuk for 20,000 Iraqi Turkmen, who also fled ISIS after the group captured Sinjar. Such “humanitarian zones” on the other side of the border allow the state to manage refugee pressures inside Syria or Iraq before refugees reach Turkey. This is a preferred solution for Turkey, as it is already hosting close to 2 million refugees. Some humanitarian workers interviewed for this report suggested that these humanitarian zones, protected by no fly zones, should be enlarged and multiplied in order to prevent further refugee influxes in a humane manner.<sup>65</sup>

60. “At the zero-point on the Turkey-Syria border, supplies sent by Turkey are driven to the no man’s land, where they are unloaded and transferred to the Syrian side. Much of this assistance is received by Syrian aid groups, which then distribute it inside the country,” Aid Inside Syria: Too Little, But Not Too Late, Refugees International, April 24, 2013, <http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/aid-inside-syria-too-little-not-too-late>.

61. Michelle Nichols, “U.N. Security Council unanimously approves Syria aid access resolution,” *Reuters*, February 22, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/22/us-syria-crisis-un-idUSBREA1L0OV20140222>.

62. “Delivery of Humanitarian Aid Has Started at the Syrian Border Zero Point,” Republic of Turkey Prime Minister, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, Press Release, August 18, 2012, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/www.afetacil.gov\\_tr\\_ingilizce\\_Site\\_haber\\_ing\\_haber\\_detay.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/www.afetacil.gov_tr_ingilizce_Site_haber_ing_haber_detay.pdf).

63. “Turkey hardens military position after Syria downs jet,” *CNN*, June 27, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/26/world/meast/turkey-syria-plane/>.

64. “Turkey to build camp inside Iraq for Yazidis,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 13, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-build-camp-inside-iraq-for-yazidis.aspx?PageID=238&NID=70394&NewsCatID=359>.

65. Interview, Bülbülzade Foundation official, Gaziantep, February 2015.

Establishing camps on the other side of the border is not without risks. In November 2012, for instance, the regime forces attacked the Atmeh camp, which was held by opposition forces.<sup>66</sup> When we asked humanitarian workers about how they delivered aid through the zero-point delivery system, they explained that the situation was changing on a daily basis especially with the increase in ISIS activities. The border crossings held by ISIS are closed, preventing humanitarian agencies from delivering aid to civilians in ISIS-held areas. Even in rebel-held areas, they remarked that there was constant pressure by the regime and ISIS on multiple fronts. While they could deliver aid one day, it could easily prove impossible the next day because ISIS or the regime would take over certain towns and villages. This dynamic made it extremely dangerous and difficult to deliver aid.<sup>67</sup> One NGO worker in Gaziantep was skeptical about the ability of the Syrian aid workers to deliver the aid to those in need on the Syrian side of the border. She added that the international organizations were more effective on this front.<sup>68</sup> Others disagree, however, noting that they are able to deliver aid to 20 different regions inside Syria under the control of the Free Syrian Army and have already delivered 280 truckloads of aid through their Syrian contacts.<sup>69</sup>

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When we asked humanitarian workers about how they delivered aid through the zero-point delivery system, they explained that the situation was changing on a daily basis especially with the increase in ISIS activities.

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Territorial ambitions of various groups on the Syrian side of the border, such as the de facto autonomous zones created by the PKK-linked PYD, have been a concern for Turkey. Turkey's foreign policy was also challenged by the ISIS's march toward Kobani in the fall of 2014. The fight produced approximately 200,000 additional refugees in a matter of days. Some of the Kurds living in Turkey wanted to go and join the fight in Kobani. There were reports that some of the refugees

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66. Loveday Morris, "Syrian jets bomb border area that is home to refugees, rebel fighters," *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/syrian-jets-bomb-border-area-that-is-home-to-refugees-rebel-fighters/2012/11/26/cacabf8a-37d7-11e2-a263-f0ebffed2f15\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syrian-jets-bomb-border-area-that-is-home-to-refugees-rebel-fighters/2012/11/26/cacabf8a-37d7-11e2-a263-f0ebffed2f15_story.html).

67. Interview, IHH official, Istanbul, February 2015.

68. Interview, NGO worker, Gaziantep, February 2015.

69. Interview, Urfa Platform Official, Şanlıurfa, February 2015.

also wanted to go back to aid the resistance against ISIS. Turkey did not want yet another border crossing to fall to ISIS, but it was also wary of the ambitions of and the de facto autonomous zone created by the PYD. By allowing the northern Iraqi Peshmergas to go through its territory to reach Kobani, Turkey helped stop ISIS from capturing the town.<sup>70</sup>

Many of the Kurdish refugees who wanted to cross back and forth between Turkey and Kobani to aid the PYD forces constituted a significant challenge for Turkey's open door policy, as the country found it difficult to manage the inflow of 192,000 refugees. In the end, Turkey was able to maintain the open door policy for the refugees after modified it with some additional restrictions, such as requiring passports from incoming refugees. As of the end of March 2015, news reports indicate that Turkey may have closed down the remaining open border crossings after ISIS advanced. It is not entirely clear if this may prove to be temporary, but it is clear that Turkey is doing everything it can to keep the lifelines for civilians open, although it may prove impossible in the end. Again, in the case of a new refugee influx, Turkey would probably open its borders again to prevent a humanitarian disaster at its border.

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70. "Turkey: 200 Peshmerga being sent to Kobani," Al Jazeera English, October 24, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/10/Kobani-peshmerga-turkey-20141023123750537963.html>.

# CONCLUSION

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Responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in a truly humane manner has been a deliberate policy choice by the Turkish government. As a result, Turkey reworked its emergency response capacity and took it to the next level, often exceeding international standards. Today, the country hosts almost 2 million refugees in both its refugee camps and in the cities, mostly bordering Syria. Although AFAD and civil society organizations in the region exhibited an exemplary accomplishment in accommodating these refugees, the prolongation of the conflict may necessitate a larger scale international enterprise to handle the growing refugee crisis. So far, most of international aid was rightfully channeled to countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, which face a direr situation because of their size and the ability of their economy to absorb the refugees. However, in a potential extension of the conflict and deterioration of the situation on the ground, Turkey may need to make difficult choices that could hamper humanitarian efforts.

During our visit to the region, we witnessed some of the challenges that need to be addressed with the support of the international community. Priority should be given to the education of refugee youths and children as well as to the building of effective healthcare services for the refugees in the region. Moreover, the refugees who live in the major metropolitan areas need to be better integrated to Turkish society. Of course all of these need to take place without endangering social peace and harmony between refugees and the local Turkish population. So far, Turkish society overall has been largely supportive of the government's open door

policy for the Syrian refugees. However, considering the possible prolongation of this conflict, more long-term policies need to be adopted to prevent potential frictions between Syrian refugees and local populations.

As the report demonstrated, Turkey built a significant degree of capacity in dealing with humanitarian disasters. Particularly AFAD, in a very short period of time developed an immense and effective machinery in dealing with the refugee crisis. This has been a major plus for the country's institutional development, as it created non-traditional bureaucratic structures to address the refugee crisis. Humanitarian policies became a significant dimension of Turkish foreign policy in the context of the Syrian conflict. While Turkish foreign policy was challenged by the developments on the ground, the steps Turkey took in hosting the refugees (allowing military and humanitarian aid to flow to Kobani) indicate that the country's policy was informed by the realities on the ground. That is why, Turkey has been arguing for a comprehensive solution to the Syrian conflict as the only viable way to lighten its burden and relieve the suffering in Syria as well as the Syrian diaspora. This policy proposal by Turkey is very much informed by its efforts to deal with the refugee crisis and developments on the ground. In this sense, while shaping its foreign policy, the Turkish government has taken into account the humanitarian concerns as well as feedback from the humanitarian community working on the refugee issues. In order to understand Turkish foreign policy and establish meaningful avenues of communication and coordination, its Western partners will need to be more responsive to the humanitarian needs on the ground. Continued lack of Western attention will only reinforce the common Turkish view that the West is interested only in its strategic and political interests.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## **To the Turkish government,**

- Establish a steering committee, including government officials, civil society representatives, refugee representatives, and academics, to formulate a comprehensive, long-term integration policy. International non-governmental organizations should be engaged in this process to allow for an input by the international community.
- Continue to give full support to AFAD, but also work to ensure the full cooperation of other government agencies through continued political support to deliver bureaucratic compliance and timely responses to rapid developments on the ground.
- Pass a law allowing skilled Syrian workers and professionals to work as soon as possible in urgently needed sectors, such as health and education. In the later stages, it can be expanded to other sectors where Turkish businesses need it the most, in a phased and segmented way so as not to provoke political backlash against refugees.
- In line with identification of certain sectors and industrial towns that need the additional workforce the most, consider plans to inform and encourage Syrian refugees to relocate to those towns in a planned and organized fashion.
- Ensure that Syrian refugees as well as authorities are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities to avoid misperceptions and violation of refugee rights.
- Create policies to ensure enrollment of the majority of school-age children to prevent social problems, including exploitation and abuse.

- Despite the general frustration with the international community, continue to engage the international community to keep the focus on the humanitarian challenges and advocate for increased international involvement.

**To the international community,**

- Establish a broader conversation with the Turkish government on how to help the country's efforts, especially given that Turkey has taken it upon itself to respond to the refugee crises. Such a dialogue may help improve the international community's response to refugee challenges to ensure that assistance reaches those in need.
- Increase the level of support through UNHCR's appeal for Turkey.
- Engage Turkish authorities to identify the areas where help is needed the most and provide support in the most urgent areas, such as food and housing.
- Engage civil society to provide guidance and increase funding for training of humanitarian personnel.
- Support Turkey's efforts to help internally displaced and refugee populations, currently living inside Syria and Iraq. While focusing on the most urgent needs of refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq may be sensible, recognize that Turkey's activities are not limited to the refugees currently living in the country but also beyond its borders, which have a regional impact on the refugee crisis.
- Assume a greater responsibility by admitting substantial numbers of refugees and asylum seekers into Western countries to lighten the burden of neighboring nations, including Turkey. This should be done in significant numbers, so as to avoid the perception that the West is only interested in the "best and the brightest" of the refugees.

## TIMELINE

March 2011	Protests begin against the Assad regime.
April 2011	First Syrian refugees arrive in Turkey.
May 2011	Government designates AFAD as the lead organization to coordinate its response to the refugees.
June 2011	Turkey begins delivering food aid to Syrians inside Syria.
June 6, 2011	The siege of Jisr al-Shughour in northwestern Syria leads to a major inflow of refugees into Turkey.
October 2011	Turkey declares an “open door” policy and offers “temporary protection” for Syrian refugees.
April 2012	Over 2,500 refugees pour into Turkey in a single day, the highest ever recorded influx.
July 3, 2012	Fighting in Aleppo prompts 200,000 to flee Syria, many into Turkey.
August 2012	Turkey implements its “zero point” delivery aid practice.
September 2012	UNHCR reports that over 11,000 Syrians fled into Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon in a single day.
April 2013	The Turkish Parliament ratifies the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and establishes General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM).
April 2013	The UN Security Council issues a non-binding statement calling on all parties in Syria “to cooperate fully with the UN and relevant humanitarian organizations.”
November 2013	UNHCR estimates that there are 700,000 refugees in Turkey; 75% are women and children.
February 2014	The UN Security Council adopts a resolution to boost aid access in Syria demanding “all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for U.N. humanitarian agencies ... including across conflict lines and across borders.”
March 2014	Following the UN Security Council Resolution, Damascus agrees to open the Qamishli crossing on the Turkish border. Although the area is controlled by the PYD, Turkey allows 79 UN trucks to cross into Syria.
April 2014	The Law on Foreigners and International Protection comes into effect.
April 2014	The Ministry of Labor announces an expedited process for Syrians to obtain work permits.
June 2014	ISIS takes control of Mosul.
June 2014	ISIS announces its “Caliphate” in Syria and Iraq. The following day, the UN declares that approximately 1.2 million Iraqis have fled.
August 2014	The advance of ISIS leads Iraqi Yezidis to flee to Turkey. Turkey’s AFAD responds by setting up a tent city in Zakho in northern Iraq to host 16,000 Yezidis.
September 2014	Kobani comes under siege from ISIS. In three days, 188,000 refugees flee to Turkey. AFAD begins planning for a new camp in Suruç for 30,000 refugees. According to Turkish authorities, the influx “flat-lined” at approximately 192,000.
September 2014	ISIS begins attacking Kurdish villages along the Syrian-Turkish border, leading to massive influx of refugees. Within four days, over 188,000 refugees from Syria crossed into Turkey.
October 2014	The Turkish city of Suruç doubles in population as nearly 400,000 Kurds flee Kobani and surrounding towns.

December 2014	AFAD transfers the management of two of its refugee camps in northern Iraq to Iraqi authorities. The two camps host 35,000 people in Dohuk and Zaho.
January 2015	Turkey opens its biggest camp with a capacity to house 35,000 Syrian refugees in Suruç.
March 2015	Turkey closes two border crossings at Öncüpınar and Cilvegözü as fighting around Aleppo intensifies.
March 2015	The UN's Syria appeal for \$8.5 billion falls short by \$4.6 billion at the international pledging conference in Kuwait.

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## TURKEY'S SYRIAN REFUGEES TOWARD INTEGRATION

KILIC BUGRA KANAT, KADIR USTUN

This report is the result of a four month long research project conducted in Washington DC and in Turkey. We conducted interviews with specialists in Washington DC and undertook a two-week long research trip to Istanbul, Ankara, Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Gaziantep. We visited several refugee camps and conducted interviews with government officials, civil society organizations, opposition activists, experts, and academics as well as refugees and Syrian NGOs. In this report, we provide an overview of the situation of refugees in Turkey and the difficulties that Turkey is facing in handling such a major crisis alongside of its Southern border. We also assess the policy implications of this crisis for Turkey and the international community. We discuss Turkey's open-door policy, the camp and non-camp refugees, the legal framework, integration, the international community's response, and the impact on Turkish foreign policy choices. We end the report with a series of policy recommendations that we hope will help cope with this monumental task at hand and contribute to a better coordination between Turkey and the international community.