



# SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

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**All comments in this report reflect the views of the author and not necessarily those of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.**

**This report has been translated from Turkish.**

# SYRIANS AND OTHER REFUGEES IN TURKEY<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

It has been 8.5 years since the March 2011 outbreak of chaos in the aftermath of the protests against the regime of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad, and the civil war that followed. In Syria, whose population was 22.4 million in April 2011, at least 465,000 people have lost their lives since 2011<sup>2</sup>, hundreds of thousands of people have been injured, and more than 6-7 million Syrians have been displaced within the country. The chaotic environment in Syria has resulted in the most serious refugee exodus in the world's history. According to UNHCR data, the number of Syrian refugees who have sought asylum and been registered in the five neighboring countries is 5,626,914 as of August 2019, of which 3,643,870 reside in Turkey.<sup>3</sup> When the around 1 million Syrians who have sought asylum elsewhere, such as in Europe, Canada and the USA, are added to this figure, it becomes apparent that a minimum of 6.6 million Syrians have fled their home country since 2011. Unfortunately, the days when peace and stability are restored do not seem likely to come soon. This makes the problem more chronic. Incidents that have taken place following the Syrian crisis have resulted in new global arguments in many subjects, especially concerning the “open door policy” and “sharing the burden/responsibility”. The perceived victimization of neighboring countries in particular during this crisis has endangered continuity of this ‘open door’ policy.

Turkey plays a crucial role in the Syrian crisis. It hosts at least 54%, and 64.8% when considering only the neighboring countries, of the more than 6.6 million Syrian refugees. Since 2014, Turkey has thus become the country that hosts the highest number of refugees in the world. Notably, in 2011 prior to the outbreak of the Syrian Crisis, the number of foreigners under international protection in Turkey was merely 58,000. As of June 2017, the nations which followed Turkey were Lebanon with 15.1% of Syrian refugees, (926,000), Jordan with 10.3% (660,000), (Northern) Iraq with 3.7% (228,000) and Egypt with 1.5% (131,000). Around 14.7% of those who fled from Syria (925,000) live in Europe and 50,000 live in Canada and the USA.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the concepts of “refugees” or “asylum-seekers” used for Syrians and non-Syrians are used independently of the legal-administrative context in Turkey. Despite being a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention, Turkey imposes “geographical restriction” and only accepts those incoming from Europe as “refugees”, and issues “temporary protection” for Syrians, and provides “conditional refugee” or “secondary protection” statuses, which are different types of international protection for the other asylum-seekers.

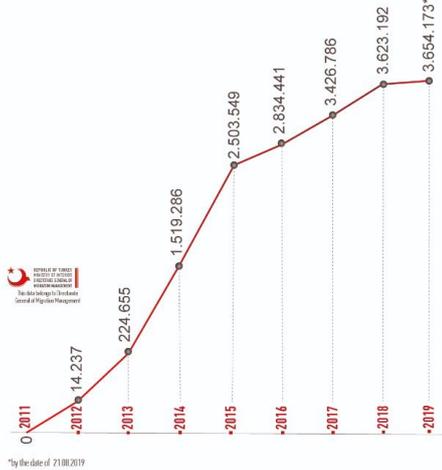
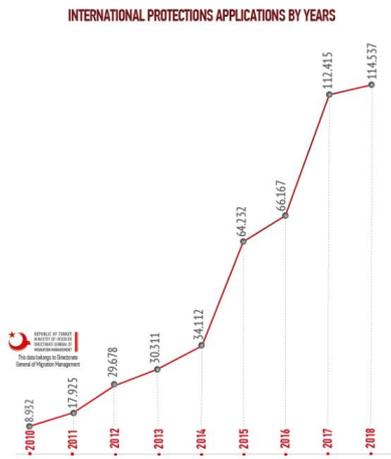
<sup>2</sup> According to the declaration of the London-based Syrian Observatory, 321,000 death incidents and 145,000 “lost” cases have been recorded. Among those who lost their lives, 96,000 were civilians and others included groups involved in armed conflict. (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 14.04.2017.)

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR: Syria Regional Refugee Response (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>) Accessed on 14.08.2019)

## SYRIANS AND OTHER ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN TURKEY<sup>4</sup>

As of August 2019, the number of Syrians under "temporary protection" in Turkey is more than 3,643,870. Furthermore, Turkey has been exposed to a substantial influx of defectors from other countries and since 2011 especially from Afghanistan and Iraq. In September 2018, the figure given by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) regarding non-Syrian asylum-seekers was 367,000. In August 2019, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) estimated the total of those having applied for international protection between 2010-2018 at 478,309. This is to say, the number of those under international protection in Turkey, 58,018 in the year 2011, is now 4,122,179, considering only those who are officially registered. These figures, which exceed 5.02% of the population in Turkey, suggest that the "open door policy" applied by Turkey for Syrians has been available for other asylum-seekers as well. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that there is a serious problem of "informality", especially among non-Syrian asylum-seekers.

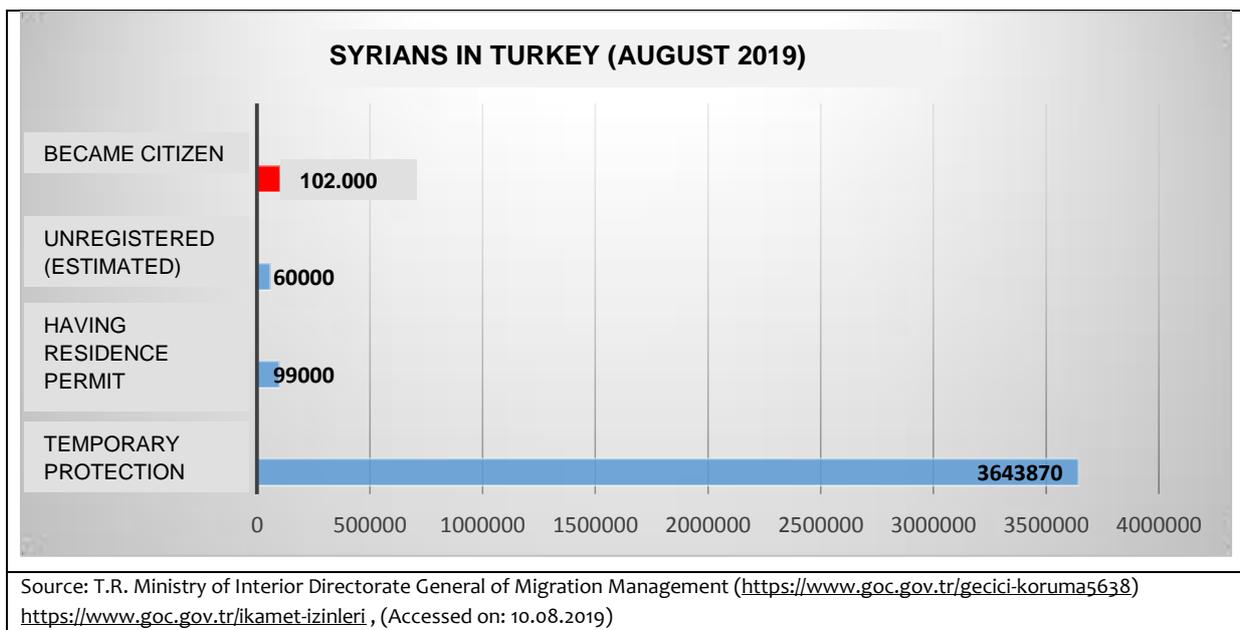
Although Turkey *de facto* ended the "open door policy" after 2016 - and built a wall that exceeds 900 km in the last two years along its Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian borders in order to both combat terrorism and reduce irregular migration - entry-exit operations across the Turkish borders remain 'in progress.'<sup>5</sup> This situation leads to serious shortcomings in Turkey's border security despite the walls.

SYRIAN u.TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY YEARS	INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION APPLICATIONS BY YEARS																																								
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<sup>4</sup> In some parts of the study, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey" written by M. Murat Erdoğan in June 2017 for KAS-Turkey and "Demographical Development Of The Syrian Refugee Population and its Potential Impacts on the Education, Employment and Municipality Services in Turkey in Near Future" written in June 2019 within the scope of QUDRA Project of GIZ were used.

<sup>5</sup> According to the declarations of the Ministry of Interior, the number of arrested non-Syrian "irregular migrants" was 280,000 in 2018 and more than 160,000 in the first half of 2019. There is no information about those who were not arrested.

“Temporary protection” is the form of international protection provided in Turkey to most Syrian refugees, since the geographical reservation imposed by Turkey in the Geneva Convention precludes the provision of “refugee” status to non-European asylum-seekers. Furthermore, those having fled “massively” due to war to a neighboring country are expected to return to their home country after the war has ended.<sup>6</sup> Although they are referred to as “refugees” or “asylum-seekers” in everyday use, in fact, Syrians in Turkey can be separated into three different groups. The first and largest group comprises of those who sought refuge in Turkey after April 2011 and who were issued “temporary protection” status by the DGMM having taken their “biometric” records and whose number has climbed up to 3,643,870 as of late August 2019. The second group is comprised of 99,643 people who came to Turkey before 2011 and stay here with a “residence permit.” The third group is comprised of around 50,000 Syrians who came to Turkey before 2011 who have, however, not been registered yet.<sup>7</sup> The 92,280 Syrians who, as of 1 August 2019, have become citizens of Turkey in the last two years can be included as a fourth category.

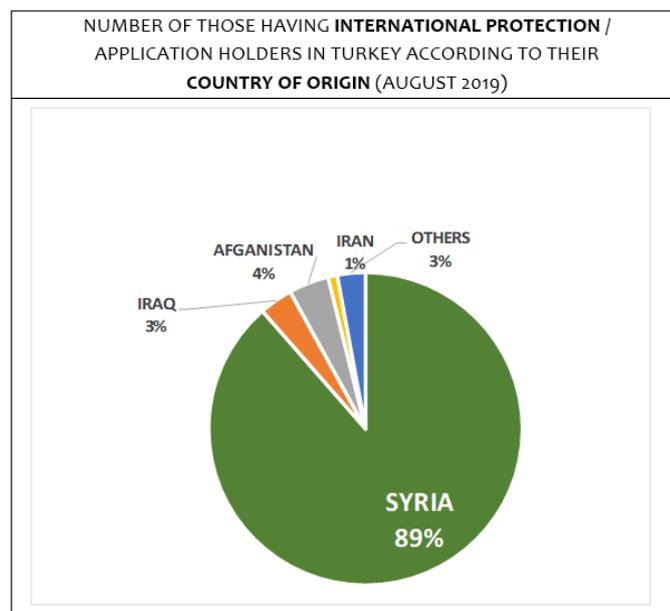


<sup>6</sup> International obligations of Turkey in terms of asylum-seekers and refugees are determined under the “1951 Geneva Convention” and the “1967 Protocol relating to the Legal Status of Refugees”. As party to the Geneva Convention, Turkey declared that it would impose a “geographical restriction” exception in the contract with a declaration dated 29 August 1961, i.e. it would not accept incomers from outside Europe for whichever reason as “refugees”. “The Law on the Foreigners and International Protection” which constituted the legal framework for migration and refugees in 2013 in Turkey and the secondary legislation, notably the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) that was drawn up later, also adopted the principle of geographical restriction. The legal status of the Syrians in Turkey has been the “temporary protection” within the framework of the “Temporary Protection Regulation”. The issue of the status of the Syrians in Turkey remains a significant subject of debate. Although Turkey has defined “temporary protection” for Syrians, which is a type of international protection in congruence with the international law, a “temporary protection” practice without a definite period in the Regulation or Law has been increasingly criticized as the period is extended and the opportunity for the Syrians to return is decreased. Here, it is interesting that the change of status for some Syrians in Turkey has become “citizen”, following a quite radical policy. The Number of those who were granted citizenship in this manner has exceeded 102,000 as of August 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Minister of Interior Soyly declared on 20 August 2019 that the number of Syrians who were granted citizenship in Turkey was 92,000 plus 10,000, which makes 102,000, 50,000 being children and 50,000 being adults, and those who were not registered yet were about 50-60 thousand. HABERTÜRK TV-20.08.2019: <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-bakan-soyly-dan-onemli-aciklamalar-2514831> (Accessed on: 22.08.2019)

Despite media coverage on some cases of "voluntary return" and those who were issued citizenship, the number of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey has been increasing day by day according to the data updated by DGMM. It is evident that the average 465 Syrian babies who are born in Turkey everyday have an effect on this increase, as well as the ongoing border crossings. It can be noted that this is a serious "shock" for the Turkish state and Turkish community which had 58,000 asylum-seekers in 2011.

The increasing influx of asylum-seekers in Turkey that started from 29 April 2011 and fundamentally increased after 2013, was not confined only to Syrians. Some (around 500-700 thousand) of those asylum-seekers who are generally referred to as "irregular migrants" by the State transited to Europe between 2014-2016, and some stayed in Turkey. As of July 2019, the total number of non-Syrians in Turkey who have applied for or are currently in possession of international protection status are more than 470,000. According to UNHCR Turkey data from September 2018, this figure included 170,000 Afghans, 142,000 Iraqis and 39,000 Iranians. However, it is unknown how the figures are distributed exactly within the updated 470,000 declared by DGMM. Probably, the number of Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians has further increased within the "other" category in the figure below, in parallel with a similar distribution.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the flow of human beings that the formal organizations in Turkey refer to as "irregular migrants", which probably include asylum seekers, is ongoing with a massive volume.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> There are many arguments suggesting that informality has been seriously increased since 10 September 2018 among non-Syrian asylum seekers. The reason for that is that the registration operation of non-Syrian asylum-seekers was assigned from UNHCR to DGMM. In this way, all applications regarding international protection request and registration operations were assigned from UNHCR to DGMM. This has resulted in concerns among many non-Syrian individuals who seek international protection, that they will be "deported" on condition that they are registered to the Turkish authorities. Therefore, although the data on the number of Syrians in Turkey corresponds to the real numbers for the most part, it is estimated that the number of non-Syrians in Turkish territory at present is far much higher than the current official figures.

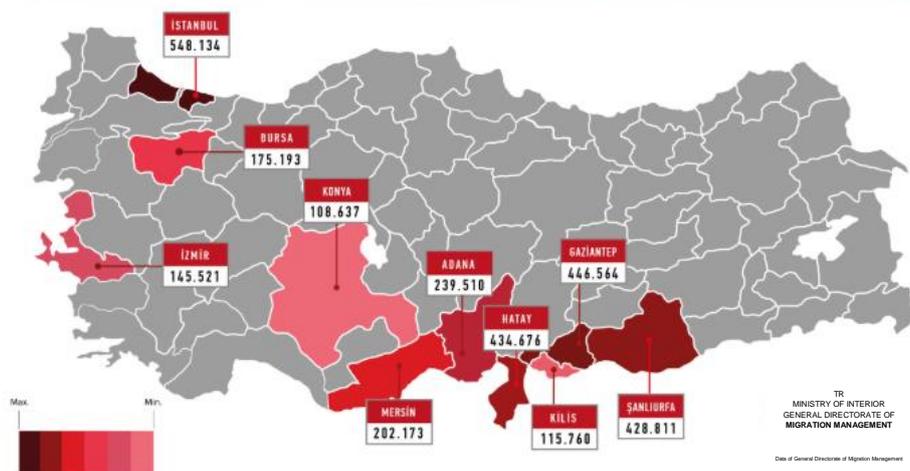
<sup>9</sup> Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu: "We arrested 175,752 irregular migrants in 2017, and 268,000 in 2018, ... the number of arrested irregular migrants has been 177. 654 as of 29 July this year. And it will increase to 300.000 "Anadolu Agency (2.8.2019) <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/29-temmuz-itibariyla-177-bin-654-duzensiz-gocmen-yakalandi/1547989> (Accessed on: 20.08.2019)

## SYRIANS IN TURKEY: DATA AND PROGRESS <sup>10</sup>

### General Figures and Rates

The number of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey is 3,643,870, as of August 2019. This figure shows that, with an average family size of 5.8, there are around 620,000 Syrian households in Turkey.<sup>11</sup> As of August 2019, Syrians correspond to 4.44% of Turkey's 82 million inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> Istanbul is the city hosting the largest number of Syrians in Turkey, with 547,943. The ratio of the registered Syrians to the population in Istanbul is 3.64%. However, it is estimated that 300,000 more Syrians live in Istanbul, who are registered elsewhere. If this group is also included in the calculation, the rate is increased to 5.6%. In terms of hosting the most migrants, the city of Gaziantep follows Istanbul, having 445,000 registered Syrians (21.4% of the population), 432,000 Syrians live in Hatay (26.8% of the population) and 429,000 in Şanlıurfa (21.1% of the population). The Syrian proportion of the population is extremely high in these provinces. Kilis is the province that hosts the highest number of Syrians at provincial level in proportion to its population. The population of Kilis is 142,000, while the number of Syrians is 116,000. That means that 81.6% of Kilis's population is Syrian. The number of provinces where Syrians are present with a number higher than 100,000 is 10. The arrival of quite a high number of Syrians to the urban areas which already have many structural problems has further increased poverty and the problems in public services.

**Distribution of Syrians within the Scope of Temporary Protection in Top 10 Provinces**



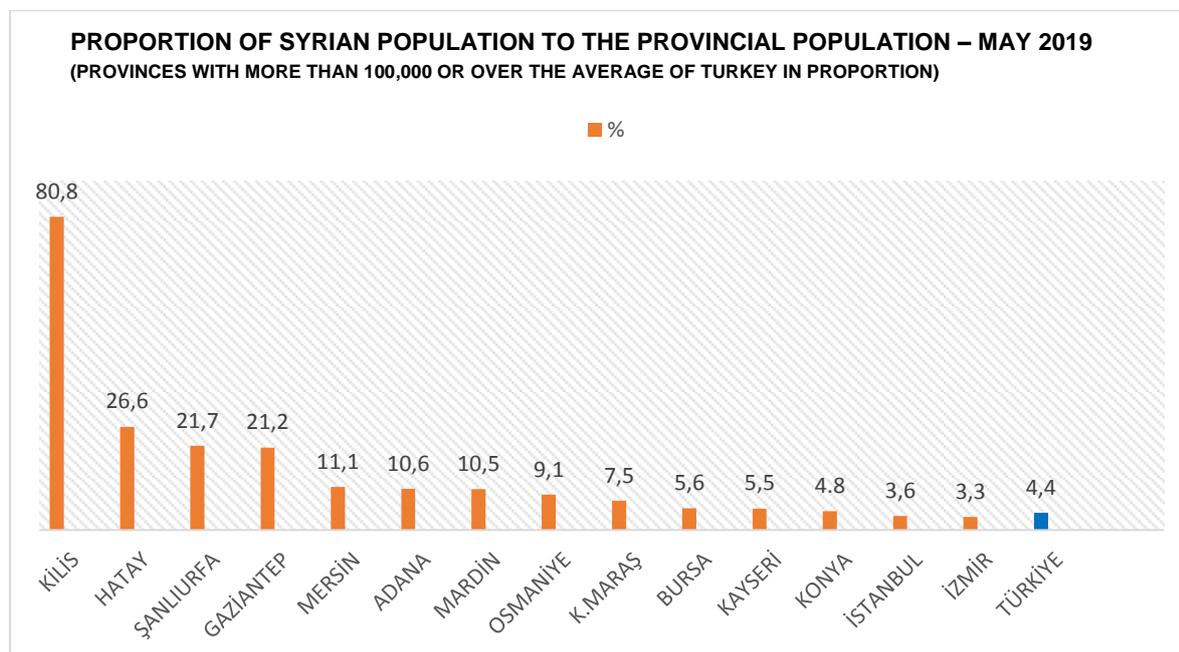
<sup>10</sup> Syrians referred here to those under temporary protection in Turkey. There is no public data on the other categories.

<sup>11</sup> In a study carried out under the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Program, it has been expressed that 2.4 million Syrians who applied for ESSN aid constitute 413,000 families. Here, the family size is 5.8. See: Turkish Red Crescent and World Food Programme (2019). Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings. Ankara, Turkey.

<sup>12</sup> DGMM calculates this rate using the ratio between two "independent variables". If 3.6 million is added to 82 million, and the ratio of 3.6 million within the total figure of 85.6 million is identified, then the ratio to the Turkish population is 4.2%. This situation creates significant differences in some province-based data.

## “Urban Refugees”

Some of the Syrian refugees in Turkey have become “urban refugees” after the year 2013. As of August 2019, of the more than 3.6 million Syrians, only 1.8% (67,000) stay in one of the 7 camps spread 5 provinces: Hatay (3), Kilis (1), Adana (1), Kahramanmaraş (1), Osmaniye (1). There is an ongoing decrease in the number of those living in these camps. Probably, the number of those living in camps will decrease to less than 1% in 2020. That is to say, the vast majority of Syrians live outside the camps as urban refugees, distributed across almost all of Turkey. However, Turkey did not make a settlement plan for the Syrians. Especially from the end of 2013, when the capacity in the camps was surpassed, Syrians were allowed to settle anywhere they liked. As expected, Syrians were spread to the places where their relatives who can support them reside, or where they can work. The belief held by the Turkish Government that the war would end soon and the asylum-seekers would return home to Syria resulted in the asylum seekers’ spontaneous distribution. This “natural” and quite “liberal” settlement process resulted in an extraordinarily unbalanced distribution of migrants between regions, provinces, towns and even quarters and neighborhoods. For instance, quite different figures can be seen between 39 different towns in Istanbul. This is the case in the cities of Gaziantep, Hatay and Şanlıurfa, too. As is the case in Kilis, the number of Syrians even exceeds the number of Turkish citizens in some towns, cities and villages in the border region.

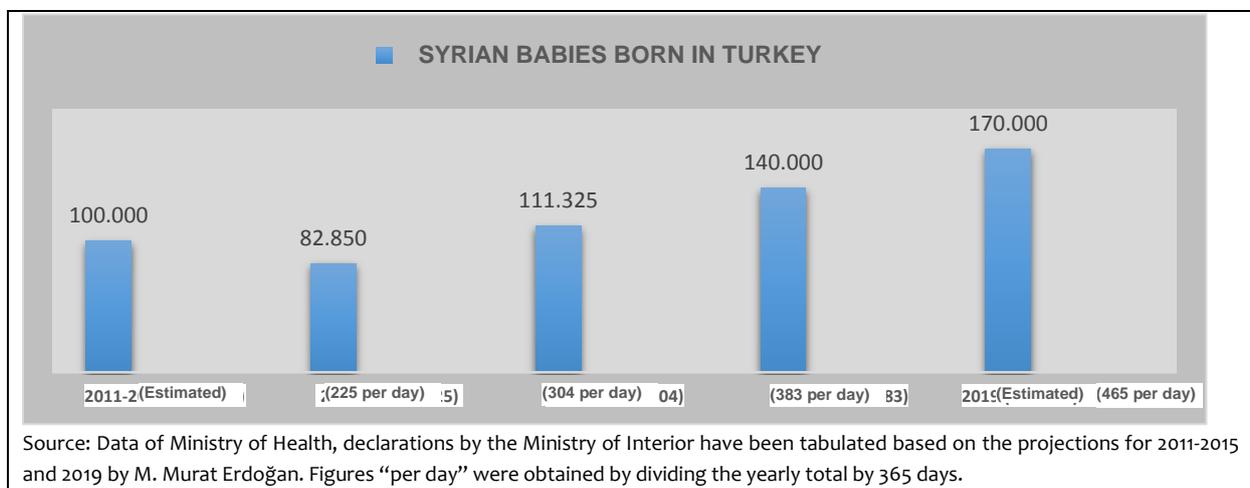


## Age and Gender

The age groups and gender characteristics of the Syrians in Turkey are especially noteworthy. The number of those within the 0-4 age group among Syrians is 14.7%, or 539,000. More than 1 million 694,000 Syrians, i.e. 46.4% within the total figure, are comprised of young people and children under 18. An interesting issue is that the male population (54.1%) is quite a bit higher than the female population (45.8%). The number of those of “Active working age” between 15-64 is over 2 million.

## Syrians Born in Turkey

The number of Syrians born in Turkey after 2011 is ever-increasing. Quite understandably, as a result of the normalization of life, this number is estimated to be around 100,000 within the total figure, despite the uncertainty in the number of babies born between 2011 and 2015. However, according to the official data of the Turkish Ministry of Health, within Turkey, 82,850 Syrians were born in 2016, 111,325 in 2017 and 140,000 in 2018 in Turkey. It can be foreseen with a simple projection that the number of newborns will be minimum 170,000 in 2019. That is, it is foreseen that the average number of Syrians to be born in Turkey in 2019 will be 465 per day. In this regard, it can be said with confidence that the number of Syrians born in Turkey has already exceeded 450,000.<sup>13</sup> A significant problem with the Syrians born in Turkey is that they have “de facto stateless” status, since neither the Syrian State nor Turkey automatically grants citizenship.



## Education

The limited data on the general education status of the Syrian population that corresponds to 4.42% of the Turkish population suggest that Syrians have a lower education level than the average in Turkey, and almost half are either illiterate or never attended school.<sup>14</sup> This can be explained by the fact that those who come to Turkey from Syria are generally coming from the rural and quite traditional region of the Northern Syria, where their opportunity to access education was limited for decades in line with the policy of the Syrian regime.<sup>15</sup> A second important factor is that the education level of the around 700,000 Syrians who left Turkey between 2014-2016 was comparatively higher than those who stayed.

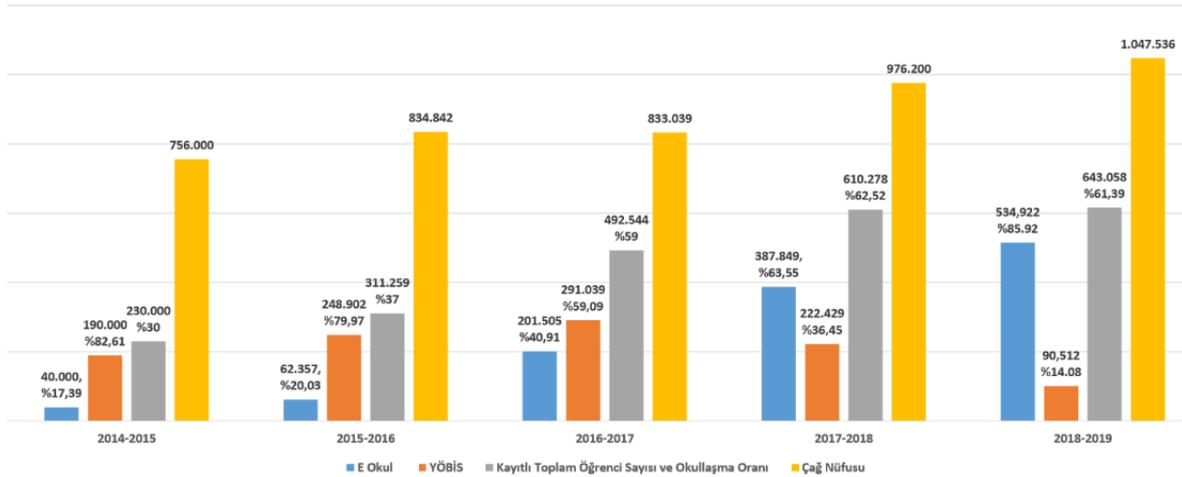
<sup>13</sup> Minister of Interior Soylu declared on 20 August 2019 that this figure was 400,000. HABERTÜRK TV-20.08.2019: <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-bakan-soylu-dan-onemli-aciklamalar-2514831> (Accessed on: 22.08.2019)

<sup>14</sup> Almost only official source regarding the issue so far has been the study entitled “First Stage Needs Analysis that covers the 2016-2018 Period for Syrians under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey” published by TR Ministry of Development in 2016 within the scope of “Turkey-EU Refugee Consensus” negotiations. Education level of the Syrians coming to Turkey has a quite negative overview, Based on current data available. Accordingly, the rate of illiterate Syrians is 33.3%, while the rate of literate yet non-graduate Syrians is 13%.

<sup>15</sup> The rate of illiterate Syrians that seems to be 33.3% in Turkey seems 13% in Jordan, 14% in Lebanon and 10% in Iraq. See: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) (2017) Jobs Make the Difference Expanding Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities Egypt - Iraq - Jordan - Lebanon - Syria – Turkey, p.83.

General education level is significant in the social cohesion process, especially in terms of determining the support of families for the education of their children. The issue of the education of Syrian children in Turkey is vitally important for minimizing the extent to which young Syrians will become a ‘lost generation’, and for ensuring humane living conditions and future planning for peaceful co-existence. According to the data of DGMM and the Ministry of National Education (MEB), the number of Syrian children in the compulsory schooling age group in Turkey, i.e. between the ages 5-17 is 1,047,536. This figure corresponds to 28.97% of the total number of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. In places which were exposed to a sudden influx and host Syrians more than 10% in proportion to their population, the situation has required that Turkey exerts an extraordinary effort, which has challenged the nation’s entire education capacity. Among Syrian children, 230,000 were schooled in 2014-2015 school year, 311,000 in 2015-2016, 492,000 in 2016-2017 and 643,058 in 2018-2019. This figure will probably exceed 800,000 in the next school year. According to the recent data, at present, 61.41% of Syrians in Turkey have been schooled. Schooling rates of these students according to MEB data organized by the relevant education levels, show 33.86% at Kindergarten, 96.50% at Primary School, 57.66% at Middle School and 26.77% at High School levels. However, data on schooled Syrian children indicate that there is a serious imbalance between the schooling rates. Although the schooling rate exceeds 90% in Primary School grades 1 and 2, this rate decreases to 57.66% in grades 5, 6, 7 and 8 (10-13 ages), and decreases yet further to 26.77% in grades 9-12 (14-17 age group).

#### Number of Syrian Students Provided with Access to Primary and Middle School Education in Turkey in Years



■ E- SCHOOL (Turkish) 
 ■ YÖBİS (Temporary.Education.Centers-in Arabic) 
 ■ Total Number of Registered Students 
 ■ Population in Schooling Age  
 MEB – Directorate General for Lifelong Learning  
[https://hbgm.meb.gov.tr/meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2019\\_06/26115239\\_14\\_HAziran\\_\\_2019\\_YNTERNET\\_SUNUUU\\_.pdf](https://hbgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2019_06/26115239_14_HAziran__2019_YNTERNET_SUNUUU_.pdf) (Accessed on: 07.07.2019)

In the year 2016, the MEB has made great achievements for Syrian students. The first significant step taken by the MEB was to sign on 3 March 2016 an agreement amounting to 300 million EUR with the EU Delegation for education expenses, under the auspices of Financial Assistance for the Refugees (Syrians) in Turkey (FRIT). Furthermore, the most significant step was taken in August 2016 when the MEB determined the “road map” for the Syrian children's access to education, and also established the “Migration and Emergency Education Department” under the General

Directorate of Lifelong Learning and strengthened its institutional capacity.<sup>16</sup> In the road map, the issue of educating the Syrian youth was considered as an issue which would be “permanent” rather than “temporary”, and the main objective thus became to integrate Syrian children into the Turkish education system.

There are some critical reasons for Syrian students to stay outside of school during their compulsory schooling age. These include the perception that their stay in Turkey is “temporary”, financial difficulties which often necessitate boys to hold jobs, capacity problems of the schools, transport costs, not sending girls to school and concerns about assimilation. In this respect, it is critically important that the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) institutions make a contribution to Turkey’s conditional school support programs. This support is being distributed to Syrian families in the form of 40 TL for girls and 35 TL for boys attending primary school, as well as 60 TL for girls and 50 TL for boys attending middle school on a bi-monthly basis. However, considering regional differences, it is vital to implement these active “conditional support” programs at even higher amounts.

Undoubtedly, it is an extraordinary achievement that the Turkish educational system has been able to include 643,000 out of the 1 million Syrian children of schooling age in Turkey. This figure is even higher than the total number of students at the primary school level in many European countries. Furthermore, this achievement has been possible only with substantial exertion, as the technical capacity increase in the MEB is extremely limited. Education is a field in which a positive outcome has been achieved through rapid, targeted investments. In other words, the need for trained personnel is as high as the need for new schools or classrooms. General and province-based needs analyses were investigated in the MEB’s July 2017 ‘needs analysis’ study.<sup>17</sup> Here, the most notable finding is that Turkey needs to build “1189 new schools” in order to be able to accommodate all the Syrian children of schooling age when the analysis was carried out. However, the number of “Schools to be built within the Scope of EU Projects” was stated at merely 183, which corresponds to only 15.3% of the identified need.<sup>18</sup> According to the current figures, Turkey will need a total of 1,454 24-classroom-schools as well as 52,376 teachers in order to ensure that all Syrian children will be able to receive a standard education. However, it is evident that it will take quite a long time to fully meet these requirements, and the share of Syrian youth belonging to a ‘lost generation’ will increase in the meantime. Undoubtedly, education is an item of capacity and cost at the same time. According to the calculations by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), the average cost of a primary school-middle school-high school student per year was 8,111 TL in 2017.<sup>19</sup> Based on this figure, it is observed that the yearly cost of schooling more than 640,000 Syrian children is 5.1 billion TL, which corresponds to (6.3 TL= 1 Euro) 823 million EUR, based on the Turkish Lira - Euro currency exchange rate on 7 June 2019.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.meb.gov.tr/suriyeli-cocuklarin-egitimi-icin-yol-haritasi-belirlendi/haber/11750/tr>

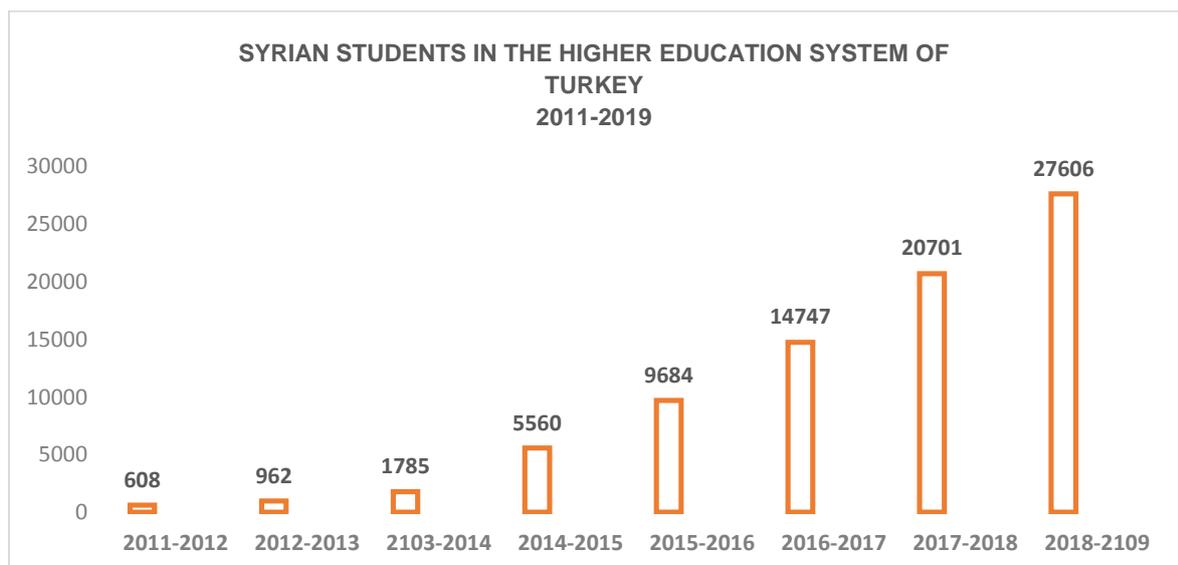
<sup>17</sup> TR Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, Migration and Emergency Education Department, Education Services for the Students under Temporary Protection, July 2017 (ppp: Slide: 37).

<sup>18</sup> For the aim of supporting the Education Infrastructure for Syrians under Temporary Protection, EU planned the construction of 75 Concrete School Buildings (150 million EUR) under FRIT, 30 School Buildings, Prefabricated plus Concrete (68 million EUR) under MADAD2, and 46 Prefabricated Schools (45 million EUR) under FRIT (Additional Fund). TR Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, Migration and Emergency Education Department, Education Services for Students under Temporary Protection, July 2017 (PPP, Slide: 36)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=27600>

## Syrian University Students in Turkey

Among Syrians present in Turkey, the number of Syrian students is ever-increasing. Some, having discontinued their education in Syria, are seeking to restart their higher education now that they have settled in Turkey. Others have earned a place in a Turkish university after having completed their primary school and high school education in Turkey, and successfully passed the Foreign Student Exams and language proficiency exams. The number of Syrian university students who studied at about 100 public and 50 private universities in Turkey was 14,747 in 2016-2017 academic year, 20,701 in 2017-2018 academic year and 27,606 in 2018-2019 academic year. Syrian students have thus been the top in terms of numeric quantity among about 140,000 international students in Turkey in the last two years. According to 2017-2018 data, there are also 410 PhD and 1650 Syrian post-graduate students studying in Turkey, all of whom are able to continue their education at public universities exempt from any tuition fees. The rate of Syrian university students on a scholarship is around 15%. The ability to attain higher education is critically important to ensuring Syrian students are able to continue their educations and careers, as well as taking an active part in cohesion processes.<sup>20</sup>



Source: YÖK (Council of Higher Education): <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> Annual figures published by YÖK were tabulated by M. Murat Erdoğan.

## Business World – Employment and Entrepreneurship

One of the most critical issues of Syrian migration to Turkey are the massive movements of people in the labor market. Many in Turkey are concerned that new-coming migrants-refugees-asylum-seekers, who will most probably work as “cheap labor,” might take their jobs. It is not an ungrounded concern. Turkey did not have any previous experience in integrating such a large number into the labor market prior to 2011. However, the Turkish community was exposed to

<sup>20</sup> M. Murat Erdoğan et al. (2019) “Elite Dialogue”: Dialogue with the Syrian Asylum-Seekers Present in Turkey through Syrian Academics and Post-Graduate Students, EU HOPES MADAD, Turkish-German University, Migration and Cohesion Research Center TAGU.

such a phenomenon as Syrians came to Turkey in 2011. Naturally, employment will be a major issue in a nation which received refugees at a rate which is more than 5% of its population in a few

years. In the TISK report<sup>21</sup>, which was prepared in 2015 and includes the relevant opinions of the Turkish Business World, it was observed that not only are workers concerned about the risk of losing their jobs due to the cheap labor supply, but also that many corporate employers also have relevant concerns, particularly regarding the negative externalities which can arise from the informal economy. Corporate firms talked about the difficulty of competing with cheap labor and the informal economy, and even argued that it would be wise to ensure the right to work for Syrians, in order to avoid the spread of such informal labor.

As Syrians started to leave the camps and migrate to urban centers after 2013, the process of including them in the economic activity started organically. For those living outside the camp, it has not been possible to provide them with regular and continuous financial support since 2011, except for very exceptional cases. Thus, it became inevitable that many would begin to work in urban areas. As the number of Syrians who started to work in the informal sector reached into the 400,000's, the Turkish state needed to make relevant arrangements, and the right to work was issued to the Syrians living in Turkey under Temporary Protection from 15 January 2016. In line with this regulation, Syrians who are registered in Turkey for a minimum of 6 months would enjoy the right to work at the proportion of 1 Syrian to 10 Turks at a work place, based on the employer's demand, and under the condition that the Syrians receive at least the minimum wage. However, despite this step being critically important for the economic activities and cohesion of Syrians in Turkey and providing Syrians the opportunity of formal employment, it failed to have the expected effect in terms of ensuring informally working Syrians moved into formal employment. According to the declaration by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services on 31 March 2019, the number of Syrian citizens who have been issued a work permit in Turkey is 31,185.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the research shows that the total Syrian labor force participation rate in Turkey is more than 30%, i.e. a minimum 1.2 million Syrians are working. Considering the Syrians in Turkey working de facto, these figures evidently indicate that the rights to work are not functional enough for the Syrians under temporary protection, and more than 95% of the Syrians working at present are working informally.<sup>23</sup> Informality is thus unfortunately the undesired reality of the Turkish economy. According to May 2019 data of TURKSTAT,<sup>24</sup> the rate of those working "without being bound to any social security institution" i.e. "informally" among active, working Turkish citizens is 34.4%. That is, more than 10 million Turkish citizens among the "labor force" over the age 15, comprising 32.3 million workers in total, are working "informally" in Turkey. All projections indicate that as 1-1.2 million Syrians in Turkey managed to survive by working informally, their financial need from the state has decreased and they are contributing to the Turkish economy. Many international institutions, notably the World Bank, have expressed that Turkey pursued the right policy by not forcing the Syrians to stay in camps and allowing their

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<sup>21</sup> Murat Erdoğan and Can Ünver [2015] Perspectives, Expectations and Suggestions of the Turkish Business Sector on Syrians in Turkey, TISK.

<sup>22</sup> It is noteworthy that this figure is lower than 32,199, which was the figure for 15 November 2018. However, it is estimated that the number of Syrians who were granted citizenship play a role in the decreased numbers.

<sup>23</sup> Important findings were achieved regarding the working life of the Syrians and others under temporary protection (especially Afghans and Iraqis). It has been found out that at least 1 person in 84% of 413,000 families that the sampling for this study represents is working. Among those, the rate of those holding the work permit is 3%. "WFP and TRC developed the Livelihoods Survey to provide additional evidence to inform the design of the transition from basic needs assistance to more sustainable livelihoods opportunities for refugees in Turkey. The survey sample is drawn from the ESSN applicant pool and aims to assess the potential for refugee integration into Turkish labor markets, as well as to identify key constraints." Turkish Red Crescent and World Food Programme (2019) Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings. Ankara, Turkey.

<sup>24</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute-TURKSTAT: <http://tuik.gov.tr/HbGetirHTML.do?id=30683> (Accessed on: 07.07.2019)

employment (even though informally), which has in turn allowed Syrians to make a contribution to the economy and facilitated refugees to lead a life compatible with human dignity, and suggested that it could be referred to as a “developmentalist refugee policy”.<sup>25</sup> It is thus inferred that informal economy creates a significant opportunity and space for Syrians, although it is not sustainable and very controversial in terms of whether it provides a “decent job”. This success is an important reason for the considerably high level of existing social acceptance in Turkey regarding Syrians, despite such acceptance being “fragile”.<sup>26</sup> The informal economy seems to have played an important role in enabling Syrians to live in Turkey in a relatively problem-free manner. More importantly, it has also played an important role in enabling Syrian refugees to work without creating unemployment among local Turks.<sup>27</sup>

Syrian entrepreneurs, of course, have made significant contributions to the economic cohesion of the Syrians in Turkey. Syrians can open up businesses in Turkey in accordance with the Turkish Code of Commerce. In businesses that are formally registered in Turkey, the owner of the business can officially apply for work permits. Although some are comprised only of self-financing micro-level businesses, the number of businesses established by Syrians in Turkey has been increasing. Syrian businesses comprise the highest number of foreign companies established in Turkey in 2017 and 2018. According to the declaration by the Ministry of Trade, it is noted that the number of companies with at least one partner of Syrian origin was 15,159 as of 26 February 2019.<sup>28</sup> It is estimated that this figure is even higher when including firms established informally. The main sectors of these Syrian companies established include wholesale, real estate and construction sectors. Some research suggests that the Syrian Joint Capital has exceeded 100 million dollars.<sup>29</sup>

### **Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Program**

Financial support programs for Syrians and other asylum-seekers in Turkey were not implemented by the end of 2016, with a few exceptions. The main program in this respect was initiated with the consensus between Turkey and the EU on 16 March 2016. Owing to the fund of 998 million EUR provided by the EU between December 2016 and April 2019, the ESSN program provided support to a total number of 1,606,404 individuals under international protection in 276,556 households in Turkey. 88.2%, i.e. 1,417,882 (almost 245,000 households) of these recipients are Syrians. This support aims to ensure that the asylum-seekers and refugees living outside the camps across Turkey are able to meet their basic needs such as food, accommodation, clothing, etc. in a way compatible with human dignity. Aid is provided by means of the KIZILAYCARD following the evaluation of the destituteness level of each refugee. This resource, which is 120 TL (almost 19

<sup>25</sup> World Bank: World Bank Report: Turkey’s Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Road Ahead, December 2015

<sup>26</sup> M. Murat Erdoğan (2018) Barometer of Syrians: Framework for Living in Harmony with Syrians, Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, Istanbul.

<sup>27</sup> Research suggests that 20% of asylum-seekers work in unqualified jobs, and 19% work in textile, 12% in construction and 10% in handicrafts. They are followed by those working in shoe-making (6%), commercial business (5%) and repair works (5%). However, there are significant differences between provinces and regions. Almost 50% of the asylum-seekers working in Istanbul work in textile sector, while 25% of those in Mersin work in agriculture. Research shows that those working in regular jobs based on a long-term contract are about 45% and 54% work in irregular jobs as unqualified workers. There is a considerable space for regular jobs in textile (79%). Those working in daily (irregular) jobs earn 1058 TL as monthly average, which is 1312 TL for regular workers. The highest average income is 1332 TL in textile sector. Unqualified labor (768 TL) and especially the agriculture sector (756 TL) constitute the areas with the lowest income. Turkish Red Crescent and World Food Programme (2019) Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings. Ankara, Turkey.

<sup>28</sup> CNN-TÜRK: <https://www.cnnturk.com/ekonomi/bakan-pekcan-15-bin-159-suriyeli-sirket-var>

<sup>29</sup> Minister of Interior Soylu emphasized during the Habertürk TV Broadcast on 20 August 2019 that working informally is prohibited for Syrians as is for all, and they provided guidance for 2 months for those in this situation, and this service would continue until 31 October. Noting that required procedure would apply to those informally employing Syrians after 31 October, Soylu stated that they would keep Syrians who are registered properly in the working life of Istanbul, but send the others back. HABERTÜRK TV-20.08.2019: <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-bakan-soylu-dan-onemli-aciklamalar-2514831> (Accessed on: 22.08.2019)

EUR based on the currency dated 23 August 2019) monthly per person has become a regular financial resource for asylum-seekers. Although ESSN support has become a regular resource for Syrians, it can only be made available to about 39% of more than 3.6 million Syrians living in about 630,000 households in Turkey. For those receiving ESSN support to ensure self-sufficiency without working at the same time is extremely difficult in urban areas. More importantly, for 2.2 million Syrians (385,000 families) who fail to receive ESSN support to make a living, there is no other option but to work.

## Cost

According to the official statistics of the Turkish government, over 8.5 years Turkey has spent 37 billion dollars for the Syrians.<sup>30</sup> Although the political, social and especially the financial sacrifice of Turkey for the Syrians since the beginning of the process has been appreciated, the financial aspect remains debated. Undoubtedly, it is not easy to estimate the exact costs of such a situation, especially given that much of the response consisted of emergency management. However, it is not realistic to claim that the approximately 4 million asylum seekers in Turkey today, in addition to the more than 3 million asylum-seekers who have been processed since 2014, do not create a serious cost for Turkey. Turkey is certainly justified in its calls for “sharing of burden”. However, there are two critical emerging problems here. Much of the spending made by Turkey for asylum-seekers has not been done transparently or efficiently, and it has not been adequately specified by the relevant authorities which spending was made where, with which resources and for which reasons.<sup>31</sup> This results in hesitations among donors. A second problem emerges from a problem of definition: It would be more appropriate for the Turkish state to mention “cost” rather than “spending,” as accepting more than 4 million asylum-seekers has many costs beyond merely direct financial spending. A calculation by Köln University in Germany provides an interesting comparison in this regard.<sup>32</sup> According to this study, the cost of 1 refugee for Germany is 15,000 EUR per year, 1.250 EUR per month and 41 EUR per day. When the cost of Syrian refugees is calculated hypothetically based on the spending figures in Germany, the figure exceeds 230 billion EUR.<sup>33</sup> However, only looking at the financial aspect is not efficiently descriptive. For instance, if Turkey proposes the to pay the EU 100 billion EUR for 5 years, being 20 billion EUR each year, and asks the EU to receive half of the asylum-seekers in Turkey (2 million) in return this offer will of course be refused. Therefore, this issue is not only about the financial burden. The main problems with accepting refugees around the world include social, political and security risks and costs.

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<sup>30</sup> President Erdoğan: “We spent 37 Billion Dollars for Syrians” (27.06.2019) <http://www.kamubulteni.com/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-suriyeliler-icin-37-milyar-dolar-harcadik-h11496.html> (Accessed on: 17.08.2019)

<sup>31</sup> For the declaration by the Deputy Prime Minister of the time on 6 December 2017, See: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/info/infografik/8044>

<sup>32</sup> Andreas Becker, “The Costs of The Refugee Crisis”, DW, February 1, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/the-costs-of-the-refugee-crisis/a-19016394> (accessed Jan 10, 2017)

<sup>33</sup> If the calculation by Köln University is taken into consideration and a calculation is made over monthly 1.250 EUR per refugee in Turkey, it is found that the total cost of Syrian refugees, being 14,237 in May-December 2011, 225,000 in 2012, 1.5 million in 2013, 2.5 million in 2014, 2.8 million in 2015, 2.9 million in 2016, 3.4 million in 2017, 3.6 million in 2018 and 3.6 million in the first 6 months of 2019 exceeds 230 billion EUR.

## Local Administrations and Local Cohesion

More than 97% of Syrians in Turkey are “urban refugees”.<sup>34</sup> The increasingly prominent UN “Global Compact on Refugees” vision also notes that local administrations are required to be one of the most significant actors on refugees, and “local cohesion” models must be given priority.<sup>35</sup> The concern over the implementation of the principles of the compact does not decrease the role de facto assigned to the local administrations. In this respect, a very critical and noteworthy process has been ongoing since 2011 in Turkey. Turkey does not have a special refugee quota and distribution system exclusive to Syrians living in urban areas. Therefore, there are critical differences in the distribution of Syrians throughout the country, politically and proportionally. These differences can be observed between different towns and districts of a province. Refugees cannot benefit from the financial support of the Municipalities, as this support, which makes up the main source of income of the municipalities, is calculated according to only the number of *Turkish* citizens in a city. In this regard, it is evident that there is a need for a legislative amendment in which registered foreigners as well as Turkish citizens are taken into consideration for the distribution of financial support to local municipalities in Turkey. However, it may not be easy to apply such a claim due to the political sensitivity. Therefore, it is essential that the international support institutions, mainly the EU, support those municipalities which host a disproportionate number of refugees further in the short term, thereby supporting “local cohesion” processes. In this frame, it is evident that providing “a resource like monthly 5 EUR per person under international protection” to municipalities from the EU, similar to ESSN scheme, would ensure a remarkable contribution to the integration process. This resource means monthly 20, yearly 240 million, EUR for 4 million asylum-seekers in Turkey.

## National and International Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs, especially international NGOs, and organizations played a significant role during the refugee crisis in Turkey. Although problems have occurred concerning the operations of NGOs,, nonetheless, numerous international organizations continue to be actively operating in Turkey at present. Strong cooperation of the Turkish State with international organizations, notably the UN, is ongoing in a profound manner. A general complaint of the Turkish government is that very limited resources have been made available to it, and many of these resources are distributed not through the institutions of Turkey, but instead autonomously. Sometimes, there have been concerns that the aid provided has served political rather than humanitarian purposes. Negative reactions to projects that aim for cohesion can also be encountered from time to time, resulting from the tendency to perceive the cohesion processes as a “trap”. In parallel, it should be considered that the spending by the EU and other organizations for cohesion is largely instrumental, and there are suspicions that the cohesion process increases the tendency of the refugees to stay permanently in Turkey.

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<sup>34</sup> For one of the most thorough research commissioned by Marmara Municipalities Union on the process management regarding municipalities and refugees in Turkey, See: M. Murat Erdoğan [2017] “Urban Refugees From “Detachment” to “Harmonization” Syrian Refugees and Process Management of Municipalities: The Case of Istanbul”, Marmara Municipalities Union Culture Publications, Istanbul

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html> (Accessed on: 01.07.2019)

It is worth noting that UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), ICMPD, the World Bank and especially GIZ have a special significance among the international organizations operating in the area of refugees in Turkey. Another development that has taken place since 2011 in Turkey is the extraordinary increase in crisis management capacity, especially in the rights of refugees and field operations. The number of people working in international organizations, NGOs, UN Organizations and in powerful local NGOs has increased to almost 50,000. This situation has both created a new working area for Turkish young people, and resulted in the development of a new and serious sector able to work in line with international principles, project development, project implementation, arrangement of Public-NGO-International Organization relations, etc. More importantly, these people have assumed a critical role between the public institutions and international institutions, and they have had the opportunity to contribute to both parties.

### **Social Acceptance and Cohesion: “Acceptance is Considerably High, but Decreasing and Fragile”**

A notable “social shock” arose as the Turkish community came face to face with more than 4.1 million refugees, amounting up to 5% of the population, up from only 58,000 in 2011. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that despite the social shock, concerns that rejection or disturbance would come to the fore, and there would grow a desire for the Syrians to go back, the level of social acceptance in the Turkish community is still extremely high. Therefore, as a whole, migration has not (and could not have) been in the agenda of local and general elections in Turkey. The performance of the Turkish community in this regard, as well as the solidarity and acceptance, has been very valuable. It can be noted that the following has had an effect on the realization of high social acceptance:

1. **Being accustomed to mass problems/crises and cultural and religious solidarity:** Undoubtedly, in the initial years of the crisis, particularly up until 2014, Turkish society automatically showed an extraordinary solidarity for the Syrians. Although this solidarity level has very rapidly deteriorated, in the beginning it helped Syrians to integrate and adapt.
2. **Leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan:** Nearly half of the society accepted Erdoğan’s policy on Syria and Syrians, almost without any hesitations, trusting the leadership of Erdoğan. This is still the case, at least in part. Therefore, a policy change of Erdoğan would be very influential.
3. **The Belief that Syrian will return:** The Turkish community still wants to believe that Syrians will go back. Reactions tend to increase when such belief is lost.
4. **Solidarity in Poverty:** As expected, Syrians living among Turkish community often co-exist with the deprived segments of Turkish society. This coexistence has substantially contributed to the creation of a considerable solidarity of poverty between the two groups. Thus, the fact that Turkey is not sufficiently wealthy yet makes acceptance easier.
5. **Loss of Jobs is limited:** One of the issues that can create the most concern and challenges acceptance is the loss of jobs that results from cheap labor. However, this situation has been easily overcome with the informal economy, which is currently exceeding 33% of the economy in Turkey. The informal economy is an area of often unacceptable exploitation;

however, in the short term Syrians managed to survive benefiting from the working opportunities that the informal economy makes available to them in Turkey. More importantly, in general, it helped ensure that Syrians did not cause mass unemployment, except for in the border regions. That at least 1.2 million working Syrians did not cause a major loss of jobs among Turks so far facilitated social acceptance.

6. **Low Rates of Crime:** A significant issue in social acceptance is the increase in crime rates that can be attributable to refugees. That Syrians have been very careful in the period of eight years and stayed away from crimes and gang formations facilitated social acceptance.
7. **Setback of Public Services has only been regional:** The potential negative impact on public service provision in mass migration situations can also have a very critical impact. It is known that critical setbacks and associated problems are often encountered in public services, especially in health, education, etc. in the border region, especially in places where more than 10% Syrians in population are hosted. However, this situation has not been seriously evident in places other than Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis and Şanlıurfa.
8. **Free Settlement:** Regular “settlement” policies that are based on quotas for refugees or migrants are critically important in terms of migration management. However, Turkey pursued a different policy in this regard – or could not pursue one – and Syrians settled on their own will in places which they would live, work and feel safe. Although it is a weakness in terms of migration management, it had a different effect in real life, and the refugees felt freer, did not drift apart, settled easily in their destinations without being exposed to social resistance, and made a life for themselves. It can be regarded as an extremely valuable example of testing the system of spontaneity.

### Discussions on Cohesion: “Cohesion” with Whom, What and Where:<sup>36</sup>

This is the first time that the Turkish community has seen such an intense movement of people, and social cohesion has come to the fore, accordingly. However, the issue of cohesion is problematic in many ways. Likewise, it is acknowledged that the issue of cohesion of whom to what and how is not very easy, particularly in this age. When it comes to Turkey, the nation has only very limited relevant experience. Still, it is evident that some significant new phenomena stand out in relation to this issue:

\* The issue of cohesion is a problematic area for states. Likewise, states carefully avoid developing a cohesion policy for masses that they do not desire to host permanently, due to the high risk that cohesion policies will increase the permanence of this settlement. This is the reason why Germany started its cohesion policies for Turks who came in 1961 only in the mid-1980s.

However, the serious cost of avoiding cohesion policies manifests itself in the medium and long term. Therefore, visionary policies are required.

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<sup>36</sup> For the most thorough study carried out in Turkey in terms of the Cohesion of the Syrians in Turkey and the approach of the Turkish community to the issue, See: M. Murat Erdoğan (2018) Barometer of Syrians: Framework for Living in Harmony with Syrians, Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, Istanbul.

- \* The cohesion process is bi-directional, and it has one pillar resting with the state and the other with the community. If the society resists cohesion, whatever the state does may not be efficient. Still, if the society is ready, the state needs to create a comprehensive cohesion policy, particularly regarding status and opportunities.
- \* Research studies show that the Turkish community maintains substantial social distance from Syrians and has the tendency towards “alienation”. The situation is the opposite with Syrians.
- \* Syrians are already convinced that they are quite harmonized with the Turkish community, while the Turkish community is extremely concerned about this situation.
- \* One of the commonly held beliefs in cohesion activities is the approach that “cohesion is easier if there is cultural affinity”. Other examples in the world, along with the Syrians in Turkey, reveal that this assumption is not very realistic, i.e. cultural affinity is but one of the elements of ensuring cohesion and the main determinant of success is rather the numeric size and the level of achievement in process management. Therefore, expecting cohesion with a sentimental approach which depends on cultural affinity may successfully create social solidarity at the onset, yet it is not sustainable. Numeric sizes must be taken into consideration and process management must be carried out without excessive sentimentality.
- \* Cohesion activities and discussions usually take place regarding migrants (newcomers). Since the Second World War, no developed country has ever encountered a refugee influx of the scale and scope which that Turkey has encountered now. As known, developed countries generally apply “welcoming” policies to migrants – especially to those who are qualified – while often refugees are unwelcome. Therefore, Turkey’s attempts to develop cohesion policies for “refugees” rather than for “migrants” was an endeavor that has not been experienced in recent history, and had to assume the risk of permanence. This situation stands out as one of the important handicaps for cohesion policies.

While the discussions of granting citizenship to Syrians in Turkey is sometimes considered a humanitarian issue, even more frequently, it is viewed as issue of interior and foreign policy. Although there is a high level of acceptance for Syrians in Turkey, there is a serious concern towards and rejection of granting Syrians citizenship among much of the Turkish community. The cohesion of refugees can only be possible with the support of the Turkish community. Concerns in this regard must therefore be taken seriously, and comprehensive strategies must be developed which will relieve the concerns.

### **The “TURKEY-EU DEAL”, THE 18<sup>th</sup> of MARCH 2016 AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

As known, the European “problem” of Syrian refugees started only in 2014, when the refugees reached Europe itself. Following 2015, the EU’s efforts focused on stopping the refugee influx and making serious and comprehensive cooperation agreements. Thereby, they hoped to create a consensus based on financial support with those countries in the Mediterranean basin where refugees were present, primarily with Turkey. The most important step of the EU’s “externalization” policy following 2016 has been the “Turkey-EU Deal” signed by Turkey and the EU on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. The deal’s compliance with international and EU law, the type of solution that it suggests, and its promises as well as achievements have all been controversial

from the start. Ultimately, the deal has been built on the goal of stopping refugees heading to the EU through Turkey, in return for financial support to be provided by the EU for refugees in Turkey. Ultimately, the deal has taken the form of a “deal of the EU member states”, whereby it is avoided that the EU itself assumes any institutional responsibility. Although there are some political commitments in the deal (e.g. visa liberalization, uplifting membership negotiations), the most significant part of the process has been financial support. Another significant pillar of the deal is that Turkey has been considered as a “secure third country for refugees” within the framework of the “readmission agreement” with Turkey. In this respect, after the deal entered into force on 4 April 2016, the EU has made a distinction between those who transit to the EU over Turkey as “Syrians” and “non-Syrians”. The “1 to 1 rule” was adopted for Syrians, whereby Syrians who transit to the EU over Turkey would be returned to Turkey; however, for each Syrian returned to Turkey, one Syrian from Turkey who has been identified within the scope of the UN Fragility Criteria would be resettled in the EU, with an upper limit of 70,000 resettled refugees per year. However, this mechanism failed due to the arguments concerning compliance with international law, quota disagreements between the EU member states, and the difficulties of implementation. This agreement has only been applied to 20,002 Syrians since 4 April 2016.<sup>37</sup> The deal’s rules for non-Syrians is much more explicit: Accordingly, all other asylum-seekers found to have transited to the Greek islands from Turkey will be returned, since Turkey is considered the “secure third country”, in accordance with the readmission agreement. As the other objectives of the deal regarding visa liberalization and re-establishment of Turkey-EU relations fell behind in a short period of time, the title was changed to “Financial Assistance Program for the Refugees in Turkey”. In this way, the EU as an institution is not beholden to any commitment, and it has developed a very simple solution to an extremely complex problem: Turkey was assigned the mission to protect the EU from refugees. In other words, the EU would keep refugees in Turkey, and in return Turkey would get a financial assistance program from the EU. Therefore, Europe has decreased its costs to a minimum, and more importantly, ensured that Turkey bears the political, security and social risks which can arise from a heavy refugee influx.

The most significant legal ground for Turkey-EU Deal is that “Turkey has been considered the secure third country for refugees,” and the “readmission agreement” has been used in this frame. On the other hand, it is evident that Turkey, which has a geographical restriction in Geneva Convention and cannot issue refugee status to the non-European refugees, does not fit this status – in terms of the rights of refugees. There are many other objections and arguments concerning this situation.

The total budget coordinated with the Financial Assistance Program is 6 billion EUR (being 3 billion EUR for 2016-2017 period and 3 billion EUR for 2018-2019 period). In the first installment, 1

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<sup>37</sup> See: “Third Yearly Report of the Financial Assistance Program for the Refugees in Turkey” Communique of the European Commission to the European Parliament and the EU Council, Brussels, 10.4.2019, COM (2019), 174 final. DGMM declares this figure as 23,055 as of 14.08.2019.

billion EUR from the EU budget and 2 billion EUR from the Member States were provided<sup>38</sup>. In the second installment, while 2 billion EUR was provided from the EU budget, 1 billion EUR was provided from the Member States. In this frame, the Program operates in these six priority areas: Humanitarian aid, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support. . However, prior to implementation, the program was contracted, with its entire operational budget of 3 billion EUR for 2016-2017 being committed with 72 projects that provide tangible outputs. In line with this progress, 2 billion EUR has already been paid, and the remainder will continue to be paid until mid-2021, as the projects within the scope of the Financial Assistance Program are implemented.<sup>39</sup>

The Turkey-EU Deal seems to have stopped the refugee influx to Europe. However, it should be noted that those suggesting that this is a very “successful” deal do not pay enough attention to the other external factors. It should be born in mind that the main reason why the refugee influx to Europe over Turkey stopped is instead the changing dynamics in Syria and particularly the intervention of Russia, rather than Turkey-EU Deal. Population policies determined by Russia, Iran, Turkey, ISIS and Kurdish groups based on the changing geopolitical situation blocked the way for new refugees. The majority of Syrians in Turkey who intended to transit to Europe had already done so. After 2017, the number of the Syrian population in Turkey has increased almost exclusively due to newborns. Meanwhile, blocking the Balkan route which can be described as “a post-modern *push back* practice”<sup>40</sup>, more strict protection of the Mediterranean, and the dire conditions in which those live, who made it to the Greek islands, but could not transit to Europe, decreased the demand for transition to Europe. However, it should not be forgotten that the refugee deal has resulted in many undesirable political developments in Turkey and strengthens both "Anti-European" and "Anti-Western" tendencies within the Turkish population. In this regard, an interesting dynamic between Turkey and the EU has emerged, and while the EU has externalized the refugee issue, Turkey has instrumentalized it in its interior and foreign policy.

Undoubtedly, the provision of financial assistance to Turkey for asylum-seekers by the EU or the EU member states is critically important for the interests of the EU. However, it is evident that it is a significant for Turkey too. The continuation of this financial assistance, which constitutes the main financial resource for much of the financial burden associated with providing asylum-seekers in Turkey with education, health, accommodation, protection, capacity development, etc., is critically important for both Turkey and the refugees. Therefore, it is essential that these resources, which were planned for four years as 3+3 billion, are continued. The addressee in this respect will not be the EU, as an institution, most probably; however, it is expected that some EU member states, most notably Germany, continue with the financial assistance program.

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<sup>38</sup> Total distribution of the contributions of the Member States can be accessed from: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/03/refugee-facility-for-turkey/>.

<sup>39</sup> Official Website of the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey: <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/tr/node/230>

<sup>40</sup> ‘Pushback’ is the term used to describe the practice by authorities of preventing people from seeking protection on their territory by forcibly returning them to another country.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TURKEY AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

The policy on Syrians pursued by Turkey since April 2011 has undergone different transformations in different periods. It is possible to observe the process management of Turkey in the four main periods of 2011-2013, 2014-2016, 2017-2018 and 2019.

**The period of 2011-2013** has been spent by responding to the process with emergency management and with expectations that the crisis would end shortly, using an intensely sentimental discourse. In this period, Turkey hosted Syrians in camps and largely focused on developments in Syria. In 2012, the number of Syrians reached to 14,000 and in 2013 to 224,000.

The most outstanding characteristics of the second period of **2014-2016** were the obvious increase in asylum-seekers, and their distribution and settlement outside the border areas. Camps were congested, and the process was prolonged as the regime in Syria persevered. The war environment that flourished with the intervention of ISIS changed the direction of the international pressure on the regime to fall, and particularly the presence of Russia was felt as a new actor in the field. This situation both increased the flight from Syria and intensified the quest of the Syrians, who noticed that there was no hope for return to their country, to start a new life in Europe. The number of Syrians in Turkey increased to 2.8 million by the end of 2016, and Turkey was heavily exposed to the influx of other asylum-seekers as well.

**During the 2017-2018 period**, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey peaked and exceeded 3.6 million. There were also many non-Syrian refugees in Turkey, increasing the total number to over 4 million, while the Government discourse also underwent a significant change at the same time. While the EU process attempted to **“externalize”** this situation, Turkey attempted to render it to boost its public standing in the world and **“instrumentalize”** the refugee crisis as a significant part of negotiations with the EU. The perception that the refugees became permanent started to be accepted both among Syrians and Turks. An important development of that period has been the refugee deal signed between Turkey and the EU. A period of cohesive policy was started in Turkey which was not fully specified by name, and was largely ongoing at the local level.

The issue of Syrians in Turkey originated as the political structure in Syria changed completely and the initial expectations were refuted. That is, the Regime that had been expected to fall became permanent with the support of Russia and Iran, Kurds supported by the USA took control of particular regions, the Free Syrian Army that Turkey supported became ineffective, and criticism among within society increased as the tendency of Syrians in Turkey to become permanent increased. The attitude of the opposition parties regarding Syrians and the Syria policy has been negative from the start, and it was frequently expressed that the Government needed to reconcile with the Syrian Government and send the Syrians back to Syria. However, the noticeable change in the discourse of President Erdoğan, the most prominent actor of the process and regarded as the **“protector of Syrians,”** who even claimed that citizenship would be issued to Syrians on 4 July 2016,<sup>41</sup> took place in January 2018. Talking about the requirement to send Syrians

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<sup>41</sup> Voice of America: “Erdoğan insists on Citizenship to Syrians (5 July 2019) <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/erdogan-suriyeliler-e-vatandaslik-konusunda-istrarci/3404718.html>

back for the first time with the “Operation Olive Branch”, Erdoğan stated that the operation in Syria had two objectives; one being the fight against terrorism, and the other being the creation of buffer zones so that Syrians could return and even be sent back.<sup>42</sup> Also considering the reactions from society, Erdoğan himself said on the day during the election process in 2018, that Syrians would be “sent back” in a short while, especially in border provinces.<sup>43</sup> During his speech on 8 February 2019, however, Erdoğan said “We would like brotherly refugees to return to their home land. We are not expected to keep 3.5 million here forever. They already intend to return to their land. Some of them can stay here, it is a different case,”<sup>44</sup> which revealed a change of attitude. In this process, public institutions frequently made declarations of “Syrians returning,” which can be interpreted as a step towards decreasing the social tension. However, it is noteworthy that DGMM, which is the relevant institution in this process, focused on the operations regarding both the citizenship of Syrians and “cohesion” activities. During the local elections on 31 March 2019, Syrians in Turkey were discussed much more than the previous elections. After the Government party failed to obtain the desired results in many locations, especially Ankara and Istanbul, the perspective that the “reason for failure” in the elections was the Syrians became prominent. Over the 8 years since the beginning of the refugee crisis, it was the first time that Syrians became such a frequent item on the political agenda. It is expected that this issue will remain highly salient in upcoming elections, as well.

## 22 July 2019 Decision of the Governorate of Istanbul and its EFFECTS

Exactly one month after the repeated elections in Istanbul, the Governorate of Istanbul made a critical decision to move out refugees who are not registered or registered in other provinces, but live in Istanbul. The decision that was announced on 22 July 2019 marked a significant change after 8 years in terms of Syrians and other refugees. The decision and practices of the Governorate of Istanbul was noteworthy from many aspects: First of all, it is inferred that such a decision did not directly originate from DGMM for entire Turkey, but that it was an initiative of the Governorate of Istanbul. It is evident that the increasing concerns of Turkish society have been influential in this decision, especially the perception of a “lack of control and policy in terms of asylum-seekers”. Indeed, the reactions to this decision to the declaration by the Ministry of Interior the same day that 80,000 “illegal migrants will be deported”<sup>45</sup> in 2019 were mostly supportive, except for some non-governmental organizations working in the field of the refugee rights. It means that the Government seems to have enforced a policy to react to and decrease the concerns of society. However, it is clear that there is a foreign policy pillar of the issue. Shortly after the announced decision, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Çavuşoğlu, declared that they suspended the “Readmission Agreement” due to both the problems which occurred regarding

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<sup>42</sup> President Erdoğan: “Why do we enter Afrin? We are not longing to possess Syrian land. However, 3.5 million Syrians are guests in our land. We are trying to send them back home. We keep an area of 2,000 kilometers under control. 130,000 refugees returned to the area of 2,000 kilometer squares. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/politika/2018/01/28/erdogan-oso-ile-mehmedim-birlikte-yuruyor/>

<sup>43</sup> “Erdoğan specified a date for Syrians in Turkey: “We may send them back after the elections. During the Gaziantep meeting, President Erdoğan said: “We aim to ensure the safety of the entire Syrian land after the election and that all of our guests can go back home”. (21.06.2019) <https://www.haberler.com/erdogan-duyurdu-suriyeli-misafirlerimizi-geri-10972558-haber/>

<sup>44</sup> Erdoğan: (08.02.2018) <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/video/erdogandan-suriyeli-mesaji-3-5-milyonu-burada-ilanihaye-saklayacak-degiliz-40735290>

<sup>45</sup> Süleyman Soyulu: This year we will deport 80,000 illegal migrants (23.07.2019) <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/07/23/suleyman-soyulu-bu-yil-80-bin-kacak-gocmeni-sinir-disi-edecegiz>

Cyprus and the non-fulfilment of many commitments on part of the EU, especially to abolish visa requirements of the citizens of the Republic of Turkey.<sup>46</sup> Declarations by the Minister of Interior S. Soylu denouncing the EU for not providing sufficient support in the fight against irregular migration and noting “You cannot stand 6 months if we open the gates”<sup>47</sup> are also interesting in terms of the “timing of operation” of the Governorate of Istanbul. On Syrians under Temporary Protection, the Governorate declared the decision: “A period has been given to the Syrian foreigners who are under temporary protection but not registered in the Istanbul province (registered in other provinces) to return to the provinces they are registered in until 20 August 2019 (later, this period has been extended to 30 October 2019<sup>48</sup>). Those who are detected not to have returned within the specified period will be dispatched to the provinces they are registered in, upon the instruction of our Ministry of Interior”. However, it is evident that there are serious difficulties in terms of content and application of this decision. The distribution of Syrians in Turkey was not based on a quota system that is “balanced” such as “Königsteiner Schlüssel”<sup>49</sup> in Germany, but totally on the free will of the Syrians. That means that Turkey did not develop a settlement policy right from the start and allowed Syrians to decide on the location to settle, depending on the expectation that the crisis would end shortly. Although a rule was imposed on the Syrians “not to leave the province of registration” after 2017, when registration operations were completed, the grounds for this were not stated. Istanbul is the province that is preferred most for working purposes, not only by foreigners but also by Turks. It is thus not surprising that Syrians also focused on there to a greater extent. However, the rate of Syrians, with the average in Turkey being 4.44%, is 3.6% in Istanbul. For instance, there are more than 80% Syrians in Kilis and more than 20% in Hatay, Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa. Syrians who are overwhelmingly registered in these four provinces are expected to leave Istanbul and return to these provinces. In this regard, the additional burden will be increased for these provinces to which the Syrians are supposed to return to. Here, the second largest problem is the working status of Syrians. The preference of Istanbul among Syrians often originated from an inability to get a job in the locations they were registered in the first place. The problems that can be created in terms of the working areas and public services if 50,000 to 80,000 people, who make a living by working in Istanbul, go back to Şanlıurfa where they are registered in do not seem to be thoroughly considered.

The Governorate’s decision on the non-Syrian irregular migrants/asylum-seekers under the heading “combating irregular migration” has been expressed as such: “Operations to combat irregular migration will be continued under the coordination of our Governorate without interruption based on the principles below”. In the meantime, both the Governorate and the Ministry of Interior made contradicting declarations concerning Syrians who were forced to sign a

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<sup>46</sup> “Çavuşoğlu: Geri Kabul Anlaşması’nı askıya aldık”, DW-22 Temmuz 2019, <https://www.dw.com/tr/%C3%A7avuu%C5%9Fo%C4%9Flu-geri-kabul-anla%C5%9Fmas%C4%B1n%C4%B1-ask%C4%B1ya-ald%C4%B1k/a-49699277> (Erişim: 18.08.2019)

<sup>47</sup> From Soylu to the EU: You cannot stand 6 months if we open the gates! Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu noted that the European Union left Turkey alone in the fight against illegal migration and warned: Do not try our patience. We will impose the severest punishment in history to those intending to make Turkey a center of illegal migration. They will get this response, be it Turkish or foreigner. We are entering in a period in which these organizers and migrant traffickers will be given a hard time. Turkey will make progress with the issue of illegal migration. It is evident that Europe has left us alone. Comforting is not enough. If Turkey does not continue this process with determination, not a single government in Europe can stand 6 months. We can try if they wish. <https://www.ensonhaber.com/soyludan-abye-kapilari-acarsak-6-ay-dayanmazsiniz.html>

<sup>48</sup> HABERTÜRK TV-20.08.2019: <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-bakan-soylu-dan-onemli-aciklamalar-2514831> (Erişim: 22.08.2019)

<sup>49</sup> The Königsteiner Schlüssel specifies how the individual states of the Federal Republic of Germany are to participate in joint financing. Two thirds of the share that a country has to bear is based on its tax revenue and one third on its population.

“voluntary return document”, some of whom were under temporary protection, in the week of 23 July. Still, there are ongoing allegations in this issue. However, the Minister of Interior Soylu stated that this situation is totally about the fight against illegal migration and declared: *“Syrians under temporary protection status, foreigners in our country under international protection or individuals in our country with residence permit shall by no means be deported”*<sup>50</sup>. It is inferred that rather those not having registered in the system of DGMM or the UNHCR were referred to, however the exact meaning of “irregular migration” or “illegal migration” being expressed by the relevant institutions or authorities remains controversial. Here, declarations especially such as “they are being deported” or “80,000 will be deported” seem problematic in terms of the situations of those seeking international protection.

Although the content and implementation of the decision are problematic and the period that was originally up until 20 August has been extended to 30 October 2019, application attempts can still be up on the agenda. Likewise, this application has created an expectation in society in terms of migration management. There may be political costs of not responding to this expectation. In this regard, the possibility that the second target of the Government will be the EU within the context of “more support” and in terms of political criticism is quite high.

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<sup>50</sup> Süleyman Soylu: Syrians under temporary protection shall by no means be deported (28.07.2019)  
<https://tr.euronews.com/2019/07/28/suleyman-soylu-koruma-statusundeki-suriyeliler-sinir-disi-edilmeyecek>

## CONCLUSION

The likelihood that the more than 3.6 million-and-growing Syrian population will be able to return to Syria is decreasing and their permanent stay in Turkey is becoming likely. The possibility that Syrians who have been living in Turkey for 4.5 years on average, almost all of whom live outside the camps co-existing with the Turkish community, having had more than 450,000 babies in Turkey, 650,000 students studying at school, 1.2 million working, and most importantly, having been distributed all over Turkey, will leave for a country in which no one knows when war will end and stability will be restored - or for a third country - is no longer present. This is due to the nature of events. Likewise, if the incoming refugees remain outside their homeland, after two years on average, the steps for a permanent stay would have already been taken. People who manage to survive in the country they live in day by day prefer to stay there, especially when the conditions are so much worse in their country of origin and there is a war situation. Although the Syrians living in Turkey say that they can go back if peace and stability are restored in their country, they also accept that it has become impossible in the short and medium term. Thus, it is a fact that the vast majority of the Syrians living in Turkey, even more than 80%, will not return and will live in Turkey permanently. It should be borne in mind that the policy of Turkey to create “secure zones” and encourage Syrians to transfer there will work for maximum 20% of them. According to UNHCR data, the number of those who returned from Turkey to Syria and stayed there during 4 years between 2014-2018 was only 55,000. Turkey needs to face this reality and develop cohesive policies for a peaceful co-existence. It is critically important to accept this reality and reflect it to state policies.

Turkey, whose number of asylum-seekers was 58,000 in 2011 and then exceeded 4.1 million in only 8.5 years, has made a remarkable achievement as a society and state. High yet fragile social acceptance is the most critical issue that remains to be dealt with. However, potential risks, weariness and concerns among the Turkish community are on the rise. Although Turkey has developed projects for a solution to many of the current problems in cooperation with international partners, it is still not possible to talk about comprehensive strategic decisiveness and planning on the part of the Turkish state. However, it creates yet another challenge that Turkey endeavors to develop cohesive policies not for “migrants” but for “asylum-seekers,” whose population exceeds millions and whose future is unpredictable to all parties. The fact that Turkish state focused on the regime in Syria rather than the asylum-seekers for a long time and assumed that the solution lied in Damascus resulted in the accumulation of problems and increased risks.

The Turkish state has shown a passive resistance to the reality of permanent stay. It is a fact that cohesive policies encourage permanent stay and states around the world avoid cohesive policies because of uncertainty or unwillingness. Such hesitations are experienced in Turkey, just as the cohesive policy implementation of Germany only began in the mid-1980s towards Turkish people who arrived in 1961. Still, this situation causes Turkey to lose time and resources and it risks an escalation of the current difficulties. There is a chance that the issue is still not sufficiently put up on the agenda of the daily politics in Turkey. However, it is a significant problem for Turkey that the economic, social, political and security risks of 3.6 million asylum-seekers are being neglected and almost ignored.

Turkey is required to face the reality, make its strategic decisions, and consider Syrians not as “guests” but people who will continue to live here, include refugees in its decision-making mechanisms and develop data-based policies instead of sentimental ones. Although cohesive policy is a risk, it should be borne in mind that it is a greater risk not to implement it, in the case that Syrians become permanent residents. It can be said that the recent policy applications of Turkey’s government aim to decrease concerns among society, and serious changes are not expected at least in terms of Syrians. However, it is essential that the State develops a healthy communication strategy, which also encompasses transparency, to enhance the resilience of the Turkish community.

In the short and medium term, it would not be surprising if Turkey further increases the pressure on the EU concerning Syrians and other refugees. The EU needs to exert more effort particularly to extend the deal and elaborate upon its content.

The Syrian refugee crisis has created discrepancies in Turkey-EU relations. On the one hand, a cooperation ground has been established which protects the EU, and Turkey proved to be a reliable partner in this respect; however, on the other hand, Turkey-EU relations have almost been reduced to refugees and Turkey seems to have assumed the function to “protect the West” as it did during the Cold War, but this time against refugees. The fact that Turkey is considered by the EU as “a cheap buffer zone” strengthens anti-European and anti-Western tendencies in Turkey. The externalization policy of the EU has been instrumentalized by Turkish politics. Unfortunately, instability and mass movement of people in the region surrounding Turkey does not seem to be nearing an end. This situation necessitates that Turkey-EU relations extend beyond only the partial sharing of financial burden to the development of strategic cooperation on more comprehensive and realistic grounds.

The extraordinary solidarity and patience of the Turkish community for 8.5 years resulted in concerns and objections, as the tendency of Syrians to stay permanently increased. It is impossible for this situation not to affect politics. Therefore, regardless of the impact of the international mechanisms and international law, it seems that both the ruling party and the opposition parties will pursue stricter policies regarding the Syrians. The future of the Syrians and other refugees seems to depend on a cooperation based on genuine burden sharing between Turkey and EU. Otherwise, the problems that become chronic may result in more troubled periods for both Turkey and the EU.