

Victims of the War: Turkey's Syrian "Guests"

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Abstract

Turkey faces with a great Syrian asylum-seekers influx today as a consequence of the Syrian Civil War, which broke out in the spring of 2011. By implementing an "open-door policy" since the outset of the conflict, Turkey has welcomed the highest Syrian refugee population. As the number of Syrians in Turkey approaching towards two million, Turkey encounters some uncertainties about the future of the asylum-seekers as well as the risk of social problems that may occur. Instead of a refugee status, Turkey has granted the Syrians the "temporary guest" status. Yet, it is questionable whether the Syrians would return to Syria as the war ends, or they become permanent residents. This study aims to discuss the situation of the Syrian asylum-seekers in Turkey. It argues that Syria crisis has turned out to be a kind of internal matter for Turkey rather than a foreign policy issue.

Keywords: Syrians, Turkey, Temporary Guests, Asylum-seekers, Problems

Savaşın Mağdurları: Türkiye'nin Suriyeli "Misafirleri"

Özet

2011 yılının baharında patlak veren Suriye İç Savaşı'nın bir sonucu olarak Türkiye bugün çok ciddi bir Suriyeli sığınmacı akınıyla karşı karşıyadır. Çatışmanın başlangıcından bu yana "açık-kapı politikası" uygulayan Türkiye, en yüksek Suriyeli mülteci nüfusunu kabul eden ülke olmuştur. Türkiye'deki Suriyeli sayısı iki milyona yaklaşırken, ülke sığınmacıların geleceğiyle ilgili belirsizliklerin yanı sıra, ortaya çıkabilecek sosyal sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Türkiye Suriyeliler'e mülteci statüsü yerine "geçici misafir" statüsü vermektedir. Ancak, Suriyeliler'in savaş bittiğinde ülkelerine geri mi dönecekleri, yoksa kalıcı sakinlere mi dönüşecekleri tartışma konusudur. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki Suriyeli sığınmacıların durumunu tartışmayı amaçlamakta; Suriye krizinin Türkiye için bir dış politika konusundan çok, bir iç politika meselesine dönüştüğünü öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeliler, Türkiye, Geçici Misafirler, Sığınmacılar, Sorunlar

The Civil War in Syria broke out in the early spring of 2011. It started as protests against Bashar al-Assad's government, yet turned out to be a more complex war as the opposition diversified in many different groups and the radical Sunni jihadist group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham- also called as Islamic State of Iraq and Levant / ISIL) got more control over Syria as well as Iraq. Now, it has been more than four years and the war still seems to be far away to come to an end. During the war, the world has witnessed severe human rights violations including indiscriminate attacks on civilians, executions, torture, kidnapping, even the use of chemical weapons.¹ More than 7.6 million Syrians have been internally displaced and almost four million have fled to neighbouring countries.²

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¹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2014: Syria, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/syria>, (13.06.2015).

² Syrian Refugee Crisis Inter-Agency Regional Update, 10.05.2015, p. 1, <http://www.unhcr.org/hk/files/2015%20Emergency/Syria/May%2015/SyrianrefugeecrisisInter-AgencyRegionalUpdate20150510.pdf>, (14.06.2015).

While the war is an important destabilizing factor in the whole Middle East region, Syria's neighbours Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq are the countries which mostly affected by this crisis. These countries have faced with a remarkable burden of the war, especially in terms of asylum-seekers.³ They not only faced with economic losses due to the instability within the region, but also accepted a great number of asylum-seekers inside their borders. The Amnesty International's 2015 report on Syrian asylum-seekers points out that 95 per cent of all the asylum-seekers are living in five countries- Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, while only 5 per cent are living in all other parts of the world.⁴

From the outset of the conflict, the Turkish government has welcomed the Syrian asylum-seekers fleeing from Syria. Turkey established more than twenty camps in ten cities for the Syrians to shelter. These cities are Adana, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Mardin, Osmaniye and Şanlıurfa. Yet, most of the Syrians live scattered in different cities of Turkey, not in the tent-camps. As the number of Syrians in Turkey approaching towards 2 million, Turkey faces some uncertainties about the future of the asylum-seekers as well as the hazard of social problems that may occur.

Turkey has been generous with her efforts towards the Syrian asylum-seekers; however, she encounters with various challenges. On one hand there is the potential of experiencing economic and social problems due to the lack of organisation of the asylum-seekers. Their registration, accomodation, reaching to health and educational services and work permit processes all indicate a complicated picture. In spite of Turkey's gracious efforts, there is considerable disorder in the case of the Syrians. On the other hand, there is some doubt in the internal and international public opinion that keeping the borders open and admitting every Syrian inside the borders means that not only civilians but also freedom fighters or radicals pass the border. This raise the question whether Turkey is able to control the refugee transition while assuring security within the country. Turkey strongly rejects these criticisms. Recently, as a response to these critisims, Turkey's Public Diplomacy Office sent a note to Al-Monitor declaring that Turkey enforces strict border security measures with adequate equipments. The note informed that Turkey has caught 71.000 people attempting illegal crossings, has barred 12.500 people from entering the country, has caught and deported 1.160 people.⁵

Turkey grants the asylum-seekers the temporary "guest" status, not a refugee status. However, it remains a question when the war will end and Turkey's guests will return their homes, or whether they could (or would) return. While there is plenty of

³ It is noteworthy to mention that the terms asylum-seeker and refugee are frequently confused. An asylum-seeker is someone who claims he or she is a refugee, but whose assertion has not yet been definitively judged. It is the national asylum system that makes a decision which asylum-seekers actually qualify for international protection. The asylum-seekers who are evaluated through proper procedures could be granted the refugee status, or not. During mass movements (usually as a consequence of conflicts or generalized violence), it is not feasible (nor necessary) to perform individual asylum interviews for everyone who has crossed the border. In such circumstances it is generally obvious why they have fled. Therefore, such groups are often declared "prima facie" refugees. UNHCR, Asylum-Seekers, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c137.html>, (22.05.2015). In the Syrians case, Turkey chooses to label the asylum-seekers as temporary guests. This issue will be discussed in the paper.

⁴ Suriyeli Mülteciler Hikayelerini Anlattı, Bianet 04.02.2015, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/162041-suriyeli-multeciler-hikayelerini-anlatti>, (19.04.2015).

⁵ Taştekin, Fehim, Is Turkey doing all it can to secure its border?, Al-Monitor 25.03.2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/turkey-sudanese-rekindle-questions-turkey-syrian-border.html#>, (14.06.2015).

ambiguity about the legal and administrative processes of the Syrians, their future is also full of uncertainties.

This paper aims to analyze the situation of the Syrian asylum-seekers in Turkey and discuss if the Syrians are still considered as Turkey's temporary guests or they are evolving into permanent residents. It is argued that the Syria problem has turned out to be a kind of internal matter for Turkey rather than a foreign policy issue.

The Syrian Conflict and the Asylum-Seekers

The Arab Spring, which refers to the waves of revolutionary protests and upheavals occurring in the Arab World in the early 2010, broke out first in Tunisia. Protests against high unemployment, poor living conditions and lack of political freedom immediately spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen and reached to Syria in the early spring of 2011. The protests against President Bashar al-Assad's government and demands for reform started in March 2011 and expanded nationwide in April. The government's response to the protests was so violent, soon the protests turned to armed rebellion and the civil war began. Now, more than four years have passed and there is too little hope that it will end in the near future. On the contrary, it worsens day by day.

The war is now not only just a battle between the groups fighting for or against President Assad, but has also become more complicated and violent as ISIS started to take over large areas of Syria.⁶ Up to now, the war has resulted in many casualties. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the death toll has exceeded 210.000 and nearly half of them are civilians, but the real figure is probably much higher since groups on both sides try to hide their casualties. The war has also left 1.5 million Syrians with some type of injury and permanent disability.⁷ On the other hand, the war has caused more than 7.6 million Syrians displaced within the country. Nearly four million have fled to neighbouring countries and North Africa.⁸

Since the beginning of the civil war, Syrian asylum-seekers issue has emerged as a tragic theme of the political agenda. Yet the problem has transcended much worse as ISIS advanced several parts of Iraq and Syria progressively. Ten thousands of people have been left their homes and most of them have fled to neighbouring countries. The majority of the Syrians escaping outside Syria have sought asylum from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has declared that the Syrian crisis has become the biggest humanitarian emergency of our era, yet the world is failing to meet the needs of refugees and the countries hosting them. He has noted that the response to the Syrian crisis have been generous.⁹ The Amnesty International has also designated the Syrian refugee crisis as the deepest refugee crisis the world has witnessed in the recent years.¹⁰ It is really a great humanitarian tragedy, which requires immediate assistance and solution by the international community; however, there is a tendency to see the crisis as a local one. While the neighbouring countries have to deal

⁶ What's Happening in Syria, BBC 20.02.2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186>, (12.06.2015).

⁷ Syria death toll now exceeds 210.000: rights group, Reuters 07.02.2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/07/us-mideast-crisis-toll-idUSKBN0LB0DY20150207>, (25.04.2015).

⁸ Syrian Refugee Crisis Inter-Agency Regional Update, p. 1.

⁹ UNHCR, Needs soar as number of Syrian refugees tops 3 million, 29.08.2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/53ff76c99.html>, (03.04.2015).

¹⁰ Son yılların en derin mülteci krizi, Bianet 20.11.2014, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/160092-son-yillarlarin-en-derin-multeci-krizi>, (19.04.2015).

with the big burden and instabilities, the rest of the world seems to ignore the depth of the crisis.

Turkey's Response

Turkey, which used to have a conflictual history of bilateral relations with Syria in terms of terror and water problem, started to improve good ties with this country after the Justice and Development Party (JDP/with its Turkish acronym-AKP) came to power. As a part of the zero-problems with neighbouring countries, the government took remarkable steps to develop both political and economic relations with Syria. In December 2004, a free-trade agreement was signed and it came into force in January 2007. The trading volume, which used to be around \$800.000 before, exceeded \$1 billion and in 2010. Cooperation between the two countries in tourism also showed remarkable development in this era. In September 2009, Turkey and Syria mutually repealed visa requirements in order to advance touristic relations.¹¹

Yet, Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria has dramatically shifted in the aftermath of the Arap Spring. Starting from the first days of the upheavals, Turkish government stood on the side of the opposition against Assad's government. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (he was the Prime Minister till 2014) was one of the first leaders who called Assad for political reforms within the country.¹² As it was realized that Assad would avoid to make reforms and was persistent on his autocratic rule, Turkey began to make direct public calls for the Syrian leader to quit¹³ and seek for a regime change in Syria.

While the Syrian leader insisted on his suppression, Turkey started to sustain more extensive support to the opposition. She not only hosted opposition meetings, but also endeavored actively to mobilize international support for them. It is also alleged that she offered a safe haven for fighters and allowed shipment of supplies including military equipments to them.¹⁴

The Turkish government has clearly declared that Turkey supports the people of Syria, while harshly condemning Assad's regime for its human rights violations. The government announced it would welcome all Syrian asylum seekers who fled from their homelands. Especially Erdoğan made many statements that the Syrian people were siblings of the Turkish people and Turkey had the responsibility to welcome all war victims. He stated that Turkey could not close the border, the government saw itself responsible for welcoming every Syrian citizen since it was a humanitarian obligation.¹⁵ The Foreign Minister (now the Prime Minister) Ahmet Davutoğlu also declared that the government would keep the borders open even if all the Syrian people wanted to flee to Turkey.¹⁶

¹¹ Yeşilyurt, Nuri, "Ortadoğu'yla İlişkiler", Oran, Baskın (Ed.), Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt III (2001-2012), İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2013, pp. 401-462, pp. 421-422.

¹² Strauss, Delphine, Erdogan urges Assad to hasten reform, Financial Times 28.03.2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8a87bfd6-5921-11e0-b9f6-00144feab49a.html#axzz3cywSbtNU>, (13.06.2015).

¹³ Burch, Jonathan, Turkish PM calls on Syria's Assad to quit, Reuters 22.11.2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/22/us-turkey-syria-idUSTRE7AL0WJ20111122>, (13.06.2015).

¹⁴ Turan, İlter, The Rise and Fall of Turkey's Middle East Policy, GMF (German Marshall Fund) On Turkey Series, 09.10.2012, p. 3., <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/rise-and-fall-turkey-s-middle-east-policy> (20.04.2015).

¹⁵ İhlas Haber Ajansı, Suriyelilere kapımız açık, 21.06.2012, <http://www.ihha.com.tr/haber-suriyelilere-kapimiz-acik-232094/>, (02.05.2015).

¹⁶ Güvenç, Duygu, Suriyeliler'e kapımız açık, Sabah 06.02.2012, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/02/06/suriyelilere-kapimiz-acik>, (02.05.2015).

Turkey, in respect to her historical, cultural and neighborhood ties with Syria, has followed an open door policy to refugees from the outset of the conflict. Turkey has been one of the most generous countries in providing various types of humanitarian aid to Syrian citizens affected by this tragedy whether under temporary protection in Turkey or inside Syrian borders. The government, primarily the President Erdoğan has shown great sensitivity to the Syrian conflict. Erdoğan himself assumed pioneering role to arouse the attention of international community, including the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), to Syrian crisis.¹⁷ Starting from the first days of the conflict, Turkish government's foreign policy discourse indicated that Turkey would stand with the people of Syria, but not with the regime.¹⁸

Actually, the war has been more chaotic and lasted much longer than the Turkish government estimated. Assad has not been defeated, while a new enemy to the democratic principles of the Western world has gained incredible power within the country. The brutal ISIS has took the control of several parts of Iraq and Syria and initiated ethnic cleansing and bloody massacres, pushing thousands of people to neighbouring borders.

In his speech to the UN Security Council on 26 February 2015, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Guterres stated that the Syrian refugee crisis overwhelmed the existing response and capacities, with 3.8 million registered refugees in the neighbouring countries and Turkey was the biggest refugee-hosting country in the world. He also noted that refugees kept on crossing the border into Turkey in significant numbers.¹⁹

Turkey and the Syrian Asylum-Seekers: Legal Framework

Turkey is a signatory country of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and 1967 New York Protocol on the Legal Status of Refugees with a "geographical limitation" clause. This means that "asylum-seekers coming from Europe" are granted the status of "refugee", while asylum-seekers coming out of Europe are not granted this status, but granted right of asylum till they pass to a third country.²⁰ Asylum-seekers coming from outside of Europe are evaluated in cooperation with UNHCR and are given temporary protection until a settlement is attained. Those asylum-seekers who are recognized as refugees are then resettled in a third country with the help of UNHCR.²¹

In parallel with the Syrian refugee crisis Turkey promulgated her Law on Foreigners and International Protection in April 2014 and the Directorate General of Migration Management has become the sole institution responsible for asylum matters. In line with international standards, the law suggests a comprehensive framework for protecting and assisting all asylum-seekers and refugees regardless of their country of

¹⁷ Syrian Refugees in Turkey-2013: Field Survey Results, AFAD, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁸ Güçer, Mehmet vd., Sınırlar Arasında Yaşam Savaşı: Suriyeli Mülteciler, USAK Rapor No:13-04, Mayıs 2013, p. 7.

¹⁹ UNHCR, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres- Written text of speech to the UN Security Council, 26.02.2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/54ef66796.html>, (04.05.2015).

²⁰ TBMM İnsan Haklarını İzleme Komisyonu Raporu, Ülkemize Sığınan Suriye Vatandaşlarının Barındıkları Çadırkentler Hakkında İnceleme Raporu 2, 2012, p. 7, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/belge/%C3%9C%20Ülkemize%20Sığınan%20Suriye%20Vatandaşlarının%20Barındıkları%20Çadırkentler%20Hakkında%20İnceleme%20Raporu%20-2-.pdf>, (12.04.2015).

²¹ Özden, Şenay, Syrian Refugees in Turkey, European University Institute (EUI), Migration Policy Center (MPC) Research Report, 2013/05, p. 5, <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-05.pdf>, (20.04.2015).

origin; while maintaining the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.²²

The law grants full refugee status to those coming to Turkey from Europe, and provides for the establishment of a new civilian body to oversee refugee applications, a process currently handled by the police. UNHCR welcomed the law as an "important advancement for international protection", while EU said it was a "clear commitment to build an effective migration management system in line with EU and international standards". Yet, the law lifts a geographical limitation. People arriving in Turkey "as a result of events from outside European countries" will only be given "conditional refugee" status.²³ The conditional refugee status is arranged in the article 62 of Law on Foreigners and International Protection. The conditional refugees are allowed to stay in Turkey till they are placed to a third country.²⁴

Law on Foreigners and International Protection is the first law on asylum in Turkey. Article 91 of this law foresees that in a case of a mass migration, Turkey can provide "temporary protection" and the cabinet has the authority to issue all arrangements according to this protection. While Turkey has taken the notion "temporary protection" from the European Union's 2001 Directive on Temporary Protection, unlike the directive, Turkey's law is not fully detailed and stays vague. The law does not recognize the right to apply for individual asylum; the rights to be given to the refugees under temporary protection are not mentioned, either. There is not a time limitation for the temporary protection and the procedure of return are not clear. It is very likely that Syrians will stay in Turkey for at least a couple of years more even if they will return to Syria when the war comes to an end. So, as the report of the Research Centre on Asylum and Migration points out, that the lack of regulations might cause new problems.²⁵

The Turkish Parliament Human Rights Monitoring Commission reports that Syrian asylum seekers fled to Turkey are granted "temporary protection"; in other words, Syrian citizens are sheltered in Turkey as "guests" till the situation in Syria normalizes. Within this legal status, Syrians are allowed to pass the Turkish border and all their humanitarian needs are supplied.²⁶

Turkey's "temporary protection" regime covers all Syrian asylum seekers, including the ones without identification cards. It also covers the stateless people and other refugees coming from Syria.²⁷ The "temporary protection" status actually based on the assumption that the Syrians would turn back to Syria as the war is over.²⁸

It is obvious that this "geographical limitation" allows Turkey to recognize the Syrians who have fled to the country as "guests" instead of "refugees" which connote a legal framework. This distinction can also be observed in the labelling of the camps where

²² UNHCR, 2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Turkey, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>, (20.05.2015).

²³ Burch, Jonathan, Turkey Has New Law on Asylum, But Sets Limits for Non-Europeans, Reuters 12.04.2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/12/us-turkey-refugees-idUSBRE93B0XO20130412>, (26.03.2015).

²⁴ Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu, Resmi Gazete, Kanun No: 6458, Sayı: 28615, 11.04.2013, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/04/20130411-2.htm>, (14.06.2015).

²⁵ İltica ve Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi (IGAM) Raporu, Sivil Toplum Örgütlerinin Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler İçin Yaptıkları Çalışmalar ile İlgili Rapor, (Research Centre on Asylum and Migration, Report on the Activities of Non Governmental Organisations for Syrian Refugees in Turkey), Sivil Düşün, 2013, p. 21.

²⁶ TBMM İnsan Haklarını İzleme Komisyonu Raporu, p. 8.

²⁷ UNHCR, Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler: Sık Sorulan Sorular, p. 1-2, http://www.unhcr.org.tr/uploads/root/sik_sorulan_sorular.pdf, (20.05.2015).

²⁸ Güçer vd., Ibid., p. 7.

Syrians stay; they are officially called as “guest-camps,” not “refugee camps”. Thus as Şenay Özden points out, Syrians in Turkey are not behaved like asylum-seekers coming from other non-European countries, either. These Syrian citizens cannot register with UNHCR to apply for asylum in a third country. As we learn from the statements of some Syrians who arrived Turkey in May 2011, at first UNHCR performed initial interviews with them in order to start processing their files. Nevertheless, due to a shift of the Turkish government’s policy afterwards, UNHCR cancelled registering Syrians. It is claimed that the shift of policy by the Turkish government stems from being technically very difficult to process asylum applications for such a huge number of asylum seekers. However, some assert that the Turkish government’s intention by implementing such kind of a policy is to prevent the interference of UNHCR or other international bodies in Turkish control over the Syrian migrant situation.²⁹

While “Başbakanlık Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı” AFAD (The Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) uses the term “refugees” in its 2013 report about the asylum-seekers in Turkey, it principally notes that the term “refugee” used in the report indicates the Syrian citizens under temporary protection status in Turkey.³⁰

The Syrian Guests in Turkey

Turkey welcomes a great population of Syria. It is striking that vast majority of the Syrians live spread all over the cities in Turkey while only a minority of them live in the camps. Actually, there are varying data and percentages in different reports and publications; it is really hard to give the exact number of Syrians since not all of them are registered. It is also noteworthy to mention that the number of the Syrians in Turkey is increasing continually, and everyday the statistics change. Up to date, the number of Syrians residing in camps is around 260.000³¹ while the total number has reached to 1.76 million³². This means that about 14 per cent of the Syrian refugees only stay in the camps. Recently, Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Center (HUGO) has surveyed a public opinion research report about “the social acceptance and integration of the Syrians in Turkey”. It is one of the most comprehensive and detailed studies about this issue and was conducted with the contribution of AFAD and public institutions. According to this report, Şanlıurfa, İstanbul, Gaziantep and Hatay are hosting the highest Syrian populations living outside the camps while Syrians live in 72 cities out of 81 in Turkey.³³

As AFAD points out in its report published in 2013, more than the half of the Syrians living in camps and the quarter of the Syrian asylum-seekers living outside the camps, accessed Turkey from an official border control without passport; while a remarkable number entered Turkey from an unofficial border point.³⁴ This gives an idea about how complicated the process is. Even getting inside the borders refer to a chaotic arrangement, not a sole standard.

²⁹ Özden, *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁰ Syrian Refugees in Turkey-2013: Field Survey Results, p. 4.

³¹ AFAD, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/TR/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=848>, (30.04.2015).

³² <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>, (13.05.2015).

³³ Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Center (HUGO) report, Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Integration Research, Research Director and Report: M. Murat Erdoğan, December 2014, p. 53, <http://www.hugo.hacettepe.edu.tr/TurkiyedekiSuriyeliler-Syrians%20in%20Turkey-Rapor-TR-EN-19022015.pdf>, (10.05.2015).

³⁴ Syrian Refugees in Turkey-2013: Field Survey Results, p. 12.

There are now twenty-four tent-camps for Syrian citizens in ten cities of Turkey. These ten cities are Adana, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Mardin, Osmaniye and Şanlıurfa. There is also a tent camp in Mardin/ Nusaybin where Iraqis stay. According to AFAD, there are 11.100 Syrians living in 2.162 tents in Adana Sarıçam Tent-City which was opened in February 2013, 9.883 Syrians living in 2.292 tents in Adıyaman Tent-City which was opened in September 2012, 17.295 Syrians living in 3.347 tents in Kahramanmaraş Tent-City which was opened in September 2012, 7.603 Syrians living in 2.083 containers in Malatya Beydağı Container-City which was opened in June 2013 and 9.199 Syrians living in 2.012 tents in Osmaniye Cevdetiye Tent-City which was opened in September 2012.

In Gaziantep, there are four tent-cities. 41.840 Syrian asylum-seekers and 8.116 Iraqis reside in 5.442 tents, 2.364 divisions and 938 containers. In Hatay, where the first tent-cities were established in 2011, there are four tent-cities and a container city. In tent-cities Altınözü-1, Altınözü-2, Yayladağı-1, Yayladağı-2 and Apaydın Container-City, totally 15.087 Syrians shelter. In Hatay, there is also a gathering center in Reyhanlı. In Kilis, there are two container cities called Öncüpınar Container-City and Elbeyli Beşiriye Container-City with a sum of 36.460 Syrians staying in 5.655 containers. In Şanlıurfa, where the biggest number of the asylum-seekers reside in camps, 19.473 Syrians stay in 4.771 tents in Ceylanpınar Tent-City, 27.836 Syrians stay in 5.000 tents in Akçakale Tent-City and 17.446 Syrians stay in 4.100 tents in Viranşehir Tent-City, 13.889 Syrians stay in 2.000 containers in Harran Container-City while 23.901 live 7.000 tents in Suruç Tent-City. In Mardin, 4.506 Syrians stay in 2.100 divisions in Derik Tent-City and 3.019 Syrians living in 1.300 tents in Midyat Tent-City. In Mardin there are also 3.852 Iraqi asylum-seekers residing in Nusaybin Tent-City and 2.623 Iraqis in Midyat. According to AFAD's April 2015 data, the total number of Syrians staying in the camps reached to 258.537.³⁵

All tent cities and container cities are equipped with health center, school, mosque, police station, center of trade, press meeting room, water tank, purifying center, playground, television room, grocery, power distribution unit and generator. Sheltering, food, health, security, social activity, education, religious service, translatorship, telecommunication, banking and other services in the tent cities and container cities are provided by Turkish public institutions.³⁶ AFAD is responsible for coordinating the humanitarian aid provided to Syrian refugees in refugee camps. The needs of the Syrians are covered by the co-work of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Health, National Education, Transportation, Food-Agriculture and Livestock, Finance; Presidency of Religious Affairs, Undersecretariat of Customs and the Red Crescent under the coordination of AFAD.³⁷

Tough there have been some concerns about the camps since they are not open to independent monitors, the high standards of services provided in these camps have been appreciated by the members of international organizations and foreign delegations who were granted access. UNHCR considered the camps as "five-star camps" has also contributed to the positive image of the camps.³⁸

³⁵ AFAD, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/TR/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=848>, (30.04.2015).

³⁶ AFAD, Disaster Report: Syria, Introduction, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=747>, (30.04.2015).

³⁷ AFAD, Afet Raporu: Suriye, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/TR/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=747>, (30.04.2015).

³⁸ IGAM raporu, p. 5.

While a minority of the Syrians reside in these camps in relatively good standards, the majority of the Syrians live outside the camps that is in different towns and cities of Turkey. The main challenge for Turkey is the increasing number of Syrians in cities. It can be argued that Turkey has already exceeded her capabilities to overcome this burden. The Prime Ministry declared that Turkey had provided \$ 5.6 billion humanitarian aid for the Syrians fled to the country.³⁹ Yet, while the crisis imposes burden on the economy, more importantly, it affects Turkey in terms of social and political dimensions, as well.

The latest statistics of UNHCR indicates that the number of the Syrian asylum-seekers reached to 1.76 million.⁴⁰ This number is ascending continually. As the Turkish government endures to construct a political discourse of “temporary guests”, there remains the question whether Turkey’s guests will return to Syria or not.

Challenges That Turkey Faces

While there is a terrifying humanitarian crisis occurring by the side of Turkey and the Turkish government feels itself responsible for keeping the borders open and providing a safe heaven for the Syrian asylum-seekers, however it should be underlined that the crisis has been evolving to a major threat to Turkey. Turkey now faces with the problem of an enormous number of refugees which will affect her future. There are many challenges the country has to deal with. First of all, registration is a big problem in the Syrian asylum-seekers case. The Syrians staying in the camps are registered by the officials of AFAD. The registration process for the Syrians living in cities is more complex. Some one who come to Turkey in legal ways with their passports are registered and issued residence permit by the Police Office of Foreigners. The Office do not register and give residence permit to the Syrians without passports. These Syrians have started to be registered by AFAD. This process started to be implemented in Gaziantep in January 2013 and expanded to Şırnak, Adana, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis and Hatay; however AFAD does not issue a paper to these Syrians.⁴¹ Even this disordered registering process shows us how difficult to provide services for the refugees are. Moreover, this process makes it hard for the Syrians to find jobs. Work permit issue is another complicated problem.

While Syrians with passports register at the Police Office of Foreigners in cities, there are coordination centers in Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa for the Syrians without passports to register. These centers are jointly administered by AFAD and the governors of the cities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has also sent a circular to the Police Headquarters of the cities Istanbul, Ankara, Konya, Mersin, İzmir, Bursa, Balıkesir, Eskişehir, Kayseri and Antalya as well as to the cities where refugee camps are located. With the circular it is noted that additional coordination centers will be opened in these 20 cities.⁴²

It should be noted that while registration has been a very complicated issue since the first wave of the Syrians asylum-seekers, there has been remarkable achievement at the end of 2014. By December, the rate of the Syrians registered reached up to 90 per cent. The Ministry of Interior Affairs, with the technical assistance of UNHCR, endeavored hard to conclude the registrations by the end of 2014. The main reasons behind the registration problem are believed to stem from its being seen unnecessary because of the assumption Syrians would soon return at first and then it would be harder to control due to the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>, (13.05.2015).

⁴¹ UNHCR, Sıkça Sorulan Sorular: Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Mülteciler, p. 2, http://www.unhcr.org.tr/uploads/root/faq_-_turkish.pdf, (27.04.2015).

⁴² Ibid.

continued refugee influx. The avoidance of people from getting registered is another factor. The eclipse in the registration process obstructs crisis management, supplying the necessities of refugees and providing security.⁴³

The myth of "five star camps" created by the government is under the threat of being ruined due to the difficulties experienced by the refugees in the urban and rural areas.⁴⁴ While the Syrians staying at the camps live in relatively good standards, majority of the refugees spread in the cities live in poor conditions and are away from satisfying their needs. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that some Syrians choose living in poverty in the cities rather than residing in the camps since they do not want to live camp-life. They choose to mobilize to big cities with the hope of finding jobs. Even the homeless Syrians reject the AFAD officials' directing them to the camps.⁴⁵ As UNHCR noted, Turkey encountered an unprecedented boost in asylum applications not only from Syrians, but also from Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians in 2014. Especially deteriorating security conditions in Iraq caused a sudden increase in Iraqi refugees with an estimated number of 100.000.⁴⁶

There is an ongoing debate on the Syrian babies born in Turkey. According to the data of the Ministry of Health, the number of the Syrian babies born in Turkey are 307 in 2011, 1.638 in 2012, 6.031 in 2013 and 39.000 in 2014.⁴⁷ This makes a total of around 47.000 babies. Yet, HUGO report indicates that the number of the Syrian babies born in Turkey is estimated to exceed 60.000.⁴⁸ So, the numbers are increasing by not only the Syrians keep fleeing to Turkey, but also by the Syrian residents' procreation. The Syrian babies born in Turkey cannot get Turkish citizenship since there is not an agreement between two states.⁴⁹ However, it is not clear how the process will be handled in the future, especially considering the possibility of the Syrians staying in Turkey permanently.

HUGO's report indicates that tough there is an increasing attitude of racism, xenophobia and hatred towards the Syrians, usually the level of social approval is incredibly high. While the protests at times and negative incidents are significant signals, they do not change the general picture. Anyway, it should be noted that this social approval is not an open-ended, sustainable situation and gets close to its limits. Living with the Syrians cannot be sustained with only the discourse of "Syrians are our brothers". The report shows that the Turkish society puts a remarkable cultural distance with the Syrians and do not approve to grant them citizenship.⁵⁰

It is hard to say that Turkey implements a consistent strategy towards the Syrian asylum-seekers. Till the beginning of 2014, it was estimated that the Assad regime would collapse soon, the war would end and the Syrians would return. Yet, it now become obvious that it is very likely the Syrians are permanent. However, Turkey's political

⁴³ HUGO report, p. 53.

⁴⁴ IGAM raporu, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Karakaş, Burcu, Sığınmacılar kamp istemiyor, Milliyet 06.04.2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/siginmacilar-kamp-istemiyor/gundem/detay/1862821/default.htm>, (10.05.2015).

⁴⁶ UNHCR, UNHCR 2015 country operations profile – Turkey, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48e0fa7f&submit=GO>, (08.05.2015).

⁴⁷ T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı 2015 Yılı Bütçe Sunumu, TBMM Genel Kurulu, 18.12.2014, p. 100, <http://www.sgb.saglik.gov.tr/content/files/haberler/ARALIK2014/sunum17.12.2014tbmmgenelkurulbutce.pdf>, (04.05.2015).

⁴⁸ HUGO report, p. 55.

⁴⁹ Kibritoğlu, Murat, Çadır Kampında Doğan Bebekler Türk Vatandaşı Olamıyor, Milliyet 18.06.2011, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cadir-kampinda-dogan-bebekler-turk-vatandasi-olamiyor/gundem/gundemdetay/18.06.2011/1403966/default.htm>, (02.05.2015).

⁵⁰ HUGO report, p. 47.

agenda and elections obstructed developing explicit policies in this sensitive matter. There is the tendency of performing temporary policies and postponing the problem by constructing the “guest discourse”.⁵¹

Melissa Phillips and Kathrine Starup points to the challenges caused by the mobility of Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey. They underline the growing trend of people moving on; first to urban areas of Turkey in search of employment and second, towards the European Union countries by land or sea routes. The authors emphasize that there has been a remarkable delay in reacting and responding to the mobility of Syrians.⁵² Anyway, for now the mobility in Turkey seems much more crucial than towards the EU countries.

There are also discussions about granting citizenship to the Syrians within the country. The opposition parties accuse the government of awarding citizenship to the Syrian asylum-seekers. In December 2013 as a response to a parliamentary question, Minister Muammer Güler declared the numbers of the Syrians that were granted Turkish citizenship between the years 2008-2013 were as follows: 2008: 396, 2009: 499, 2010: 515, 2011: 573, 2012: 841, 2013: 753.⁵³ However, it seems that the discussions will be intensified within the few years since there is large-scale prediction that the Syrians will stay longer.

It is also noteworthy to mention that the increasing number of the Syrians living in the cities is also a debate between the political parties of Turkey. The opposition parties criticize the ruling party for the policy towards Syrian refugees. For instance, Republican People’s Party’s (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi- CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu says once CHP comes to power, it will bring peace to Syria and it would send the Syrians back to the country.⁵⁴ Another opposition party, Nationalist Movement Party’s (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi- MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli says nearly two million Syrians in Turkey is primarily the consequence of the failure of AKP’s foreign policy. He points to the economic burdens of the asylum-seekers as well as signaling the threat of the distortion of Turkey’s social peace and national unity as a result of the refugee flow.⁵⁵

As Syrian refugees, with whole families gathered on street corners and begging for money in upscale and tourist areas, have become a common sight in Istanbul, the society has become disturbed. This leads the authorities to get some measures. For instance, the governor of Istanbul, Hüseyin Avni Mutlu declared that authorities would take “drastic measures” to cope with the negative consequences of Syrian refugees in Istanbul, including sending those begging in the streets back to the refugee camps in the southeastern part of Turkey “without their consent”. Mutlu gave his speech in a time that growing tensions over the increasingly visible presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey became clear as well as protests in several southeastern cities began.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Erdoğan, M. Murat, Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler, Al Jazeera Türkiye 27.03.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/turkiyedeki-suriyeliler>, (03.05.2015).

⁵² Phillips, Melissa; Starup, Kathrine, Protection Challenges of Mobility, Revista Migraciones Forzadas, Nr. 47, September 2014, p. 28.

⁵³ <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-32015sgc.pdf>, (04.05.2015).

⁵⁴ Kılıçdaroğlu: CHP İktidarında Suriye’ye huzur geldi git kendi ülkende çalış diyeceğiz, Hürriyet 10.02.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/28164774.asp>, (14.06.2015).

⁵⁵ Devlet Bahçeli’den Önemli açıklamalar, Haber Türk 03.06.2015, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1086435-devlet-bahceliden-onemli-aciklamalar>, (14.06.2015).

⁵⁶ Istanbul may place Syrian refugees in camps, Al Jazeera 16.07.2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/istanbul-may-force-syrian-refugees-into-camps-20147161740029946.html>, (04.05.2015).

While the social acceptance of the Syrians in Turkey is remarkably high, it is not possible to say that there is no discontent or apprehension within the society. It is known that a significant part of the Turkish society tends to consider the Syrians as a threat and is unhappy to see them living outside the camps. As Murat Erdoğan underlines, when it is realized that the Syrians are not temporary guests but are permanent, the risk of falling into a hostile attitude with anxiety raises.⁵⁷ For instance, this hostile kind of attitude has started to be observed in Gaziantep. There are several incidents reflected on daily media reporting the tensions and conflicts between the Turkish society and the Syrians. For instance, in August 2014 the murder of a Turkish citizen by his Syrian tenant led protests towards the Syrians.⁵⁸ In March, a group of Turks wanted to attack the Syrians living in a three-floor apartment and the police evacuated the Syrians and sent them to a tent city in Mardin.⁵⁹

In his report which analyzes the impact of Syria's refugees on southern Turkey, Soner Çağaptay points out that the shift in the ethnic balance of five border cities of Turkey such as Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Şanlıurfa and Mardin is growing. The author emphasizes that the ethnic makeup of certain Turkish border provinces is likely being reshaped by the refugees and underlines that this situation poses new challenges. Çağaptay takes Hatay as a special case and asserts that as the Syrian Arabs settle in Hatay, causing a shift in the complexion of the province, tensions are highly probable to occur between them and the local population due to the ethnic and sectarian fractions. Moreover, he underlines that high birth rates among the refugees suggest a second generation of refugees that refers to a further shift in ethnic and sectarian balances.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is a necessity to apply some integration policies in order to prevent this kind of tensions and build a social peace.

There are also rising opinion that the Syrians asylum-seekers might cause proliferation of epidemics. It should be noted that measles incidents observed in Turkey has dramatically increased within the last few years. Some believe that the great increase is related with the Syrian asylum seekers.⁶¹ Even if the increase has nothing to be related with the Syrians, the perception is important since it instigates the discontent within the society towards them.

The Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stressed the possibility of Turkey's facing an influx of two to three million more Syrian refugees if President Bashar al-Assad's forces or ISIS advance around Aleppo.⁶² Even today, as the Syrians in Turkey approaches towards two million, Turkey is very close to its limits and that probability signs a worse case scenario. İhsan Bal describes the ambiguity of the refugee problem as "maddening". He argues that first it should be decided whether the Syrians are temporary guests, or they

⁵⁷ Erdoğan, Ibid.

⁵⁸ Suriyeli kiracı evsahibini öldürdü, NTV 12.08.2014, <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25530986/>, (29.04.2015).

⁵⁹ Antep'te Suriyeli Gerilimi, CNN Türk 10.03.2015, <http://www.cnntrk.com/haber/turkiye/antepte-suriyeli-gerilimi>, (05.05.2015).

⁶⁰ Çağaptay, Soner, The Impact of Syria's Refugees on Southern Turkey, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 130, July 2014, pp. 16-19, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus130_Cagaptay_Revised3s.pdf, (29.04.2015).

⁶¹ Suriyelilerden yayılan bu hastalık Türkiye'yi sarıyor, Milliyet 24.09.2013, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/suriyelilerden-yayilan-bu-hastalik/gundem/detay/1767683/default.htm>, (26.03.2015).

⁶² Karadeniz, Tülay, Turkey fears influx of 2-3 million more Syrian refugees, Reuters 18.11.2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/18/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-idUSKCN0J216G20141118>, (05.05.2015).

are prospective citizens; then responds according to this distinction should be deployed. He underlines how important is to recognize the depth of the crisis Turkey experiences today and to evaluate the new situation sensibly in order to prevent social damages.⁶³

As HUGO underlines, Turkey and the other neighbouring countries has become like the victims of the “open door” policy. The international crisis has the potential of turning to a domestic crisis for each of these countries. This situation may lead the neighbouring countries to be warrior and even more close in the new crises and this may cause severe human tragedies.⁶⁴

Conclusion

When Lebanon welcomed her one millionth Syrian refugee on April 3rd 2014, UNHCR called the situation as a “devastating milestone”. Unfortunately, as Cameron Thibos points out, a milestone has quickly passed.⁶⁵ The situation is not as devastating for Turkey as Lebanon now, however with the biggest Syrian refugee population today, Turkey is adjacent to instability in the very near future. She faces with an incredible number of asylum-seekers and welcomes them in parallel with the government’s foreign policy discourse, mostly based on the assumption that the war will end soon and the Syrians will get back to their homeland. She has constructed a political discourse by labelling the Syrians our “temporary guests”; however, as it is realized that the war is enduring and will last much longer than it was estimated by the Turkish government at first; the “temporary guest” rhetoric has started to be questioned. The Turkish authorities should be careful with the increasing discontent towards the Syrians in order to prevent perilous problems.

Turkey has unpreparedly come down with a great asylum-seekers influx. Tough she has been pretty generous with her efforts towards the Syrian asylum-seekers and welcomes them munificently, there are plenty of ambiguities. For how long will the Syrians continue to reside in Turkey as guests, will they return to Syria or will they be Turkey’s new citizens, how will the legal, administrative processes be handled remain as big questions. What is clear is that the Syrian conflict has turned out to be a kind of internal matter for Turkey rather than a foreign policy issue since the Turkish society is directly affected by this crisis.

What Turkey needs to do, regarding the new situation in the country occurred after the great asylum-seekers flow, is to set up a road map as soon as possible with the contribution of not only public institutions but also civil society groups, international organizations, universities, local authorities and maybe representatives of the Syrian community. It is now well understood that the conflict is likely to last, so by considering the possibility of the Syrians not returning for many years, or becoming permanent residents; it is required to take new measures and develop middle and long-term policies rather than daily practices. Ignoring the problem would not help to the solution; cannot be sustained, either.

⁶³ Bal, İhsan, Mülteciler Sorununda Belirsizliğin Çıldırıcılığı, USAK Analist, Eylül 2014, s. 18, http://www.usakanalist.com//images_upload/files/sayi43yazi/s18.pdf, (06.05.2015).

⁶⁴ HUGO report, p. 47.

⁶⁵ Thibos, Cameron, One Million Syrians in Lebanon: A milestone quickly passed, European University Institute (EUI) Migration Policy Center, June 2014, p. 1, http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/31696/MPC_THIBOS_2014_.pdf?sequence=1, (20.04.2015).

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