

Syrian Refugees in Turkey



by Mehmet Ece

Thanks to Mehmet for this account of Syrian Refugees in Turkey. This is one of the ACTION FOR HUMANITY group's briefings. We intend to publish similar briefings in the future on current refugee crises across the world,

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Introduction

- Since the Syrian civil war officially began nearly 8 years ago on March 15, 2011, an estimated 450-550 thousand people have been killed. 13.1 million Syrians remain in dire need of humanitarian assistance, 6.2 million have been internally displaced and a further 5.6 million have fled the country.
- Out of the estimated 5.6 million Syrian refugees created from the Syrian civil war, over 4 million are now living in Turkey, making Turkey the largest host for refugees in the world.
- Out of 4 million, a mere 220,000 Syrian refugees are hosted in over 30 camps run by the Turkish Red Cross in partnership with 45 EU contracted humanitarian projects and 19 humanitarian organisations. This minority of registered refugees have access to public services, including education and healthcare.



A refugee child cries as she is searched by a Turkish police officer at the Syrian-Turkey border, where 16 refugees (including 3 children) had recently been shot

- However, for many refugees, gaining access to basic facilities is often difficult for number of reasons, including problems in registering with local authorities, and the language barrier. As a result, 94% of Turkish-hosted Syrian refugees still remain outside of refugee camps and have been left to fend for themselves—many by begging, collecting garbage, or being exploited in the informal and criminal economies.
- With new arrivals increasing by approximately 1,000 people per day, by 2028 Turkish authorities expect the figure to rise to 5 million. Furthermore, current tensions and future conflicts between the Turkish military and Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) in the Kurdish populated region of Syria may further increase the number of Syrian refugees, thus intensifying an already difficult crisis.



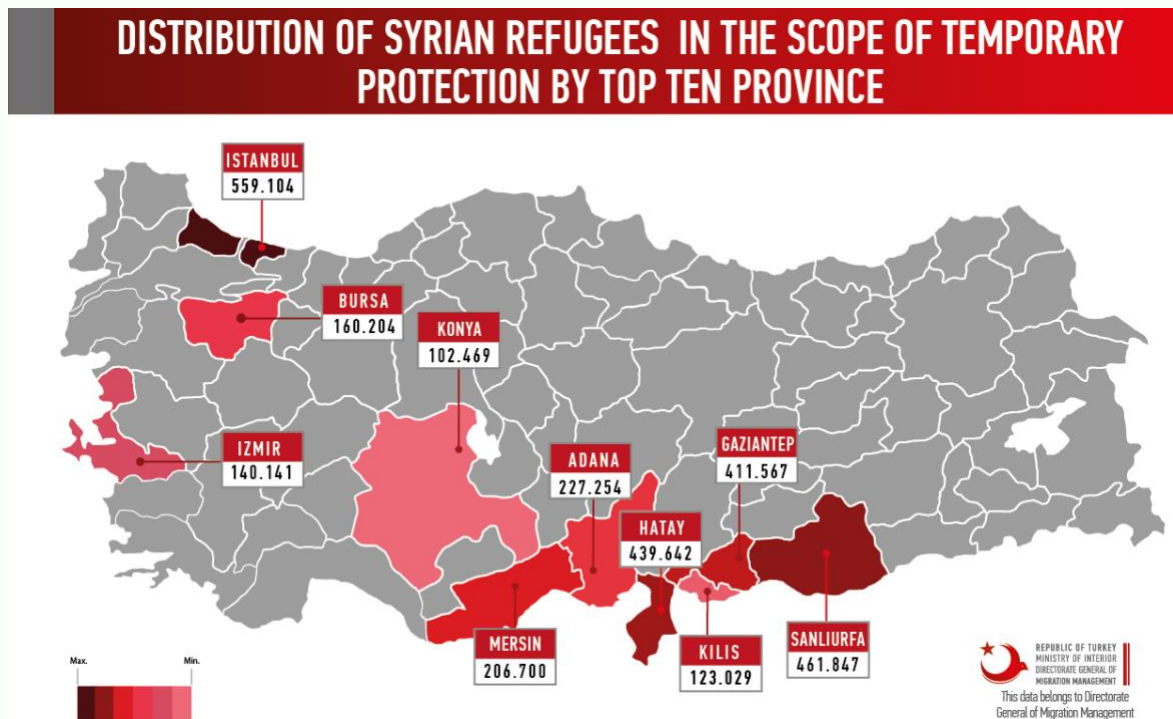
Only 220,000 out of 4 million Syrian refugees have access to a refugee camp in Turkey

EU Facility Funding for Support of Refugees in Turkey



- The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey was set up in 2015 in response to the European Council's call for significant additional funding to support Syrian refugees in Turkey. It provides a joint coordination mechanism, designed to ensure that the needs of refugees and host communities are addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- The support seeks to improve conditions for refugees in Turkey as part of the EU's comprehensive approach to addressing the refugee crisis inside and outside the EU, but also with the agreement of Turkey to clamp down on irregular migration to Europe in return for help in looking after refugees within its borders.

- The EU Facility has a total budget of €6 billion for projects including humanitarian and non-humanitarian actions. €3 billion for 2016-2017 and €3 billion for 2018-2019. To date, 72 projects have been contracted for €3 billion, out of which almost €2 billion has been disbursed.



- As part of the humanitarian support under the EU Facilities' funding, The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) has helped 1.2 million recipients cover basic needs, the CCTE (Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Programme) has helped support 266 thousand children attending school and their families, and over 20 thousand pregnant women have benefitted from ante and post-natal care services.
- As of June 2018, the European Commission has approved a new assistance package worth €400 million, for the education of Syrian refugees in Turkey. This is the first action adopted following the agreement by EU Member States to finance an additional €3 billion for the Facility for Refugees in Turkey.
- This second tranche of funding will offer vocational training to some 15,100 refugees, and offer an additional 7,400 people career counselling and assistance with job searches, as part of a wider effort to support socio-economic development.
- The projects will also include the construction and equipping of 125 solid structures and 50 prefabricated schools, which could benefit some 124,000 children annually. This will be funded alongside training provided by the Turkish Ministry of National Education in the Turkish language, which has already benefited 312,000 children.



A refugee camp on the Turkey-Syria border.

Present Challenges to integration into Turkish workforce, and Education of Syrian Children

- For many Syrian refugees in Turkey, legal employment is still inaccessible. As it stands today, fewer than 20,000 work permits have been issued to Syrian refugees so far.
- Refugees currently receiving cash support from the EU-financed cash transfer (social assistance) programme risk losing benefits if they work formally. There are also location related disincentives since the place in which a refugee is registered determines where they can seek formal work.
- Therefore, many Syrians who have moved to more dynamic labour markets such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir cannot seek formal employment there unless they change their registration location – a burdensome and costly administrative procedure.
- Low education levels and limited data on the types of skills and experiences of Syrians living in Turkey are further barriers to facilitating their employment. Data from before the war show that in the provinces near the Turkish border, Syrians' educational attainment was low compared with that of Turkish people.



As their families face financial strain, many Syrian refugee children end up begging, like this girl and her brother outside the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Istanbul.

- In Turkey, on average, around 45% of people have completed secondary or post-secondary education. Syrian refugees' lower levels of education and lack of recognized or formally documented skills are associated with the low issuance of formal work permits.
- Women, in particular, face significant challenges in obtaining effective access to the labour market. This is due, on the one hand, to obstacles such as lack of childcare and lack of information and training opportunities.



Syrian refugees thresh sesame for a Turkish farmer in Gaziantep, southern Turkey

- In addition, where they do take jobs outside their homes, women in the textile sector often face discrimination and ill-treatment. This is namely the case for ateliers operating without licence (Merdivenaltı atölyeleri) in Istanbul, where women and girls work in the rear of basements and in windowless rooms for long hours.
- A study that compared Turkish and Syrian workers revealed that Syrian men receive nearly \$95 less and Syrian female workers \$140 less than Turkish male workers' average monthly wage.
- The Turkish labour market also presents particular risks for children, given the widespread phenomenon of child labour in areas such as textile factories, as well as restaurants in cities such as Ankara. In the textile sector, approximately 19% of the workforce is underage, while this number is as high as 29% in respect of Syrians. Syrian working children under the age of 15 are much more visible in the industry than Turkish children.



A Syrian refugee boy works in a clothing factory in Gaziantep, Turkey. For many Syrians, Turkey's massive and unregulated garment industry is an attractive option to work in both legally and illegally, despite the low wages, long hours and poor conditions.

- The high percentage of young people among the Syrian asylum-seekers makes education an urgent issue. Although there are half a million Syrian refugee children attending school in Turkey, over 40 per cent of children of school-going age – or 400,000 child refugees – are still missing out on an education. Only 24% of Syrian children unregistered to refugee camps have access to education across Turkey.
- Research shows that integrating 80% of Syrian children into the Turkish education system would require at least 40,000 new teachers and 30,000 classrooms.
- Today, with unemployment and lack of education getting in the way of the hospitality process, many within Turkish society regard the high number of Syrians with growing suspicion and hostility. The state's attitude towards immigrants, meanwhile, has fluctuated between humanitarian concern and worries about national security.



Syrian children in a temporary classroom in Suruc refugee camp, Turkey.

Refoulment and Removal of Syrian Refugees

- It has been documented that Turkey is illegally sending Syrians back into Syria and, in some cases, forcing some to revoke their refugee status.
- According to a report by the Guardian on the case of Tareq, a Syrian refugee who crossed the Syrian border into Turkey on 23 different occasions, Turkish border guards turned Tareq back 22 times and on the 23rd occasion drove him to a police station called Branch 500, where he was given a choice – stay in prison, or sign a paper and walk free.

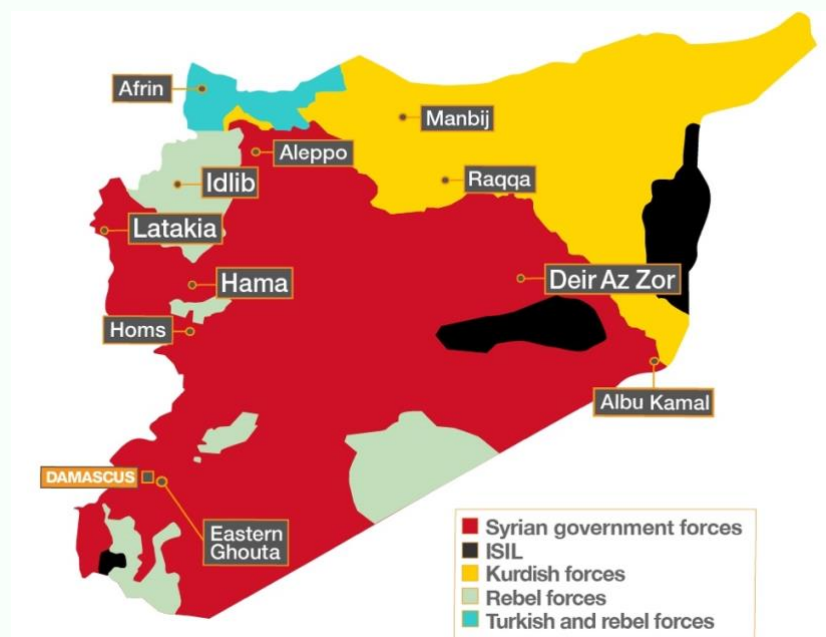


A Turkish soldier overlooks the Syrian-Turkish border wall from his outpost near the town of Kilis, south-eastern Turkey.

- It turned out that the document was an agreement to rescind his rights to asylum, and that Tareq had no other option than to sign it. The next day he was taken across the border and dropped back in Syria's Idlib, despite his protests that the conflict is ongoing in Idlib, and his protests that he doesn't know anyone in Idlib.
- Idlib is currently a fiercely contested conflict zone between Anti-Assad and Al-Qaeda linked groups, and Human rights groups say that deportations of Syrian refugees back to conflict zones is in violation of international law, which prohibits refoulement – or the forcible return of refugees back to war zones.
- Gerry Simpson, of Human Rights Watch in Geneva, said that “These are clear-cut unlawful deportations because they are refugees – and sending them back amounts to refoulement”. Many of the detention centres used to interrogate and blackmail Syrian refugees into returning to Syria have been converted from Schools and Administrative buildings using funding from the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

Turkey's Projected Invasion of Northern Syrian

- The Turkish government has been amassing troops on the Syrian border and the Turkish-proxy occupied northern region of Afrin, amid repeated threats of invasion against the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) in light of America's withdrawal of soldiers from the city of Manbij.
- In 2016, the northern Syrian region of Rojava morphed into the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) as the Kurds incorporated other ethnic groups into their governing bodies and militias – forming the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The federation was heralded as a fledgling democracy forged out of the horrors of civil war and a “secular utopia” in totalitarian, ISIS-ravaged Syria.



Turkey has been threatening to invade the yellow-marked regions held by Kurdish DFNS & SDF forces in a projected cross-border invasion that has the potential to create 1 million new Syrian refugees, further worsening an already challenging crisis.

- However, due to their links with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Kurdish, militant separatist group which has been at war for autonomy against the Turkish government for over 4 decades, Turkey considers the DFNS & SDF to be a Syrian arm of the PKK and has designated them as a terrorist organisation.
- As a result, between January to March 2018, Turkey launched a cross-border invasion of the Afrin Canton of the DFNS & SDF territory, entitled “Operation Olive Branch”.
- In December 2018 there was an international forum about "Ethnic cleansing and demographic change in Afrin", which showed evidence of the deliberate killing of Kurdish civilians and seizure of their private property by the Turkish military and its armed proxies.
- The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also said that as a result of this operation, 300,000 civilians fled or were forcibly expelled by Turkish armed militias. With their homes, private property, and an estimated 75% of agricultural land seized. In the aftermath of the conflict, Turkey implemented a policy to house the refugees they host into the seized properties and homes of displaced residents of Afrin.



Turkish-backed Syrian National Army fighters celebrating their victory in Afrin by preparing to destroy a statue of Kaveh, a heroic figure in Kurdish mythology. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated that 300,000 civilians either fled, or were forcibly expelled from the region by Turkish armed militias throughout the operation.

- This is a conflict that has been ignored by both the mainstream British media and by Parliament. As a result, analysts have said that the political silence and lack of coverage over the on-going conflict situation has given Turkey the green light to intensify their operations further into the Kurdish populated north-east of Syria.
- The government needs to be scrutinised for their silence in criticising clearly documented human rights violations across northern Syria, and future invasions by the Turkish government that could create a new humanitarian crisis.



A Turkish backed militia member poses in Afrin. After the DFNS's defeat, widespread looting was documented by Turkish backed Syrian National Army fighters against Kurdish-civilian's property. "They were like hyenas attacking a corpse," said Mohammad, an Afrin resident who witnessed the invasion, "They did not leave a car in Afrin, except the cars of some Arabs who live here, who brought their relatives from the Free Army to protect their property".

- It is likely that the Turkish Government will launch a new offensive on the northern Syrian region of Rojava against the DFNS & SDF in Manbij, Tal Abyad and the Raqqa Governorate. Fresh conflicts in these areas would have the potential to displace and create a further **1 million Syrian refugees**, placing further strain on an already demanding refugee crisis.

