



## **MPC – MIGRATION POLICY CENTRE**

Co-financed by the European Union

### ***Syrian Refugees in Turkey***

**Şenay Özden**

MPC Research Report 2013/05



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**MIGRATION POLICY CENTRE (MPC)**

**Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

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## **The Migration Policy Centre (MPC)**

### Mission statement

The Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, Florence, conducts advanced research on global migration to serve migration governance needs at European level, from developing, implementing and monitoring migration-related policies to assessing their impact on the wider economy and society.

### Rationale

Migration represents both an opportunity and a challenge. While well-managed migration may foster progress and welfare in origin- as well as destination countries, its mismanagement may put social cohesion, security and national sovereignty at risk. Sound policy-making on migration and related matters must be based on knowledge, but the construction of knowledge must in turn address policy priorities. Because migration is rapidly evolving, knowledge thereof needs to be constantly updated. Given that migration links each individual country with the rest of the world, its study requires innovative cooperation between scholars around the world.

The MPC conducts field as well as archival research, both of which are scientifically robust and policy-relevant, not only at European level, but also globally, targeting policy-makers as well as politicians. This research provides tools for addressing migration challenges, by: 1) producing policy-oriented research on aspects of migration, asylum and mobility in Europe and in countries located along migration routes to Europe, that are regarded as priorities; 2) bridging research with action by providing policy-makers and other stakeholders with results required by evidence-based policy-making, as well as necessary methodologies that address migration governance needs; 3) pooling scholars, experts, policy makers, and influential thinkers in order to identify problems, research their causes and consequences, and devise policy solutions.

The MPC's research includes a core programme and several projects, most of them co-financed by the European Union.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: [www.migrationpolicycentre.eu](http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu)

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## **Introduction and Methodology**

This report provides an overview of Syrian migration to Turkey since the start of the revolt in Syria in March 2011. The number of displaced Syrians crossing the border into Turkey has dramatically risen with the escalating use of violence employed by the Syrian regime to suppress the revolt. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 182,621 Syrian refugees were living in Turkey mid-February 2013 (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>). With the influx of huge numbers of Syrians into Turkey, anti-immigrant, anti-Arab discourses have surfaced among the Turkish public. Furthermore, due to the Turkish governments' openly hostile position to the Syrian regime, Syrian migration became closely linked with Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy. Those individuals and political bodies critical of the Turkish government assumed an anti-immigrant position accusing displaced Syrians of being armed, sectarian rebels. Therefore, analyzing the Syrian migrant community in Turkey means contextualizing it within the political framework of the host-society.

This study utilized qualitative research methods, conducting open-ended interviews with Syrian activists, Free Syrian Army members and collecting the life stories of displaced Syrians residing in the camps and in cities in Turkey. Fieldwork for this study is limited to the provinces of Gaziantep, Kilis, Islahiye, Hatay and Istanbul.

Government hospitals in Gaziantep and Kilis, where wounded Syrians get treatment, were visited; doctors treating the Syrians were interviewed. Interviews with national and international organizations such as İHH (Humanitarian Relief Foundation, a Turkish NGO), UNHCR, AFAD and Chambers of Commerce were conducted. Medical centers run by private donors and unofficial schools for Syrian children were visited. Government officials and camp administrators in Kilis and Islahiye were interviewed. Individuals from the local host communities were interviewed in order to get an assessment of the interactions between the Syrian and the local populations.

Researchers, journalists, local and international organizations have been strictly banned from entering the camps even though the authorities seem to have relaxed this policy in the past few months. I had access to two camps: the container camp in Kilis and the tent camp in Islahiye. During my time in the camps, I had no chance to speak to Syrians since in both cases I was accompanied by the camp administrators who did not allow me to do so. However, I had external access to camp residents and talked to them freely while they were outside the camp.

## **Number of Registered Syrians**

Following the crossing of about 250 Syrians into the Hatay region towards the end of April 2011, Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu held a meeting and announced that Turkey is ready to allow those Syrians in "who are not happy at home." Following the regime's violent attack against Jisr al Shughur, more than 7,000 Syrians arrived in Turkey in June, 2011. By early September 2011, Turkey had set up six refugee camps that were hosting about 7000 refugees. By December 2011, there were 8,000 registered Syrians. By 15 January 2012, the number had reached 9,500 and by the end of February 2012, it had almost reached 10,500. By mid April, 2012, the numbers had more than doubled to reach 24,000. By July 2012, there were 35,000 registered Syrians. This, then, shot up to 80000 by the end of August 2012. By mid-October, there were 100,000 and by mid-November, there were 120,000 registered Syrians. The latest figure is for 156,000 registered Syrians in Turkey. These numbers do not include those Syrians who have rented apartments outside of camps, typically in cities. There are no reliable figures as to how many Syrians are residing in cities. Even though UNHCR states that 60,000-70,000 Syrians live in cities, my observations and interviews suggest a much higher number. In November 2012, the Turkish Interior Ministry passed a law that allows those Syrians who entered the country with passports to extend their stay to one year. The Turkish finance minister stated that the government spent 533 million Turkish lira to cover the needs of Syrians through 2012.

Currently there are 15 refugee camps, 13 of them tent cities and two container camps, in seven border provinces. Other than the border provinces, there are concentrations of Syrians in Istanbul, Ankara and Bursa.

According to the latest figures of the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD, 14 January 2013 only in Turkish), the location and current capacity of the camps are as follows:

**Table 1. Numbers of Syrian refugees in camps in various provinces, mid-January 2013**

Refugee Camp	Province	No. of tents / containers	No. of refugees
Yayladağı 1-1	Hatay	2,074 tents - 259 divisions	12,708
Yayladağı 1-2	Hatay	2,074 tents - 259 divisions	3,239
Apaydın	Hatay	2,074 tents - 259 divisions	3,345
Altınözü Tekel	Hatay	2,074 tents - 259 divisions	1,212
Altınözü Boynuyogun	Hatay	2,074 tents - 259 divisions	1,622
Reyhanlı Reception Center	Hatay	2,074 tents - 259 divisions	N/A
Akcakale	Sanliurfa	4,829 tents	16,735
Ceylanpınar	Sanliurfa	4,767 tents	20,836
Kilis Oncupınar	Kilis	2,053 containers	13,074
Islahiye	Gaziantep	1,743 tents	8,360
Karkamis	Gaziantep	1,588 tents	6,235
Nizip	Gaziantep	1,580 tents	7,493
Osmaniye	Osmaniye	2,012 tents	8,228
Kahramanmaraş	Kahramanmaraş	2,300 tents	15,137
Adiyaman	Adiyaman	2,000 tents	5,993

**Source:** Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency

Meanwhile, the number of Syrian refugees living outside the camps has increased, and now possibly stands at more than 100,000 according to local estimates. Unregistered Syrian refugees are mostly located in Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, which are all border provinces in Turkey. Numbers are very roughly estimated as 50,000 Syrians in Hatay, 30,000 in Kilis, 20,000 in Gaziantep and 20,000 in Sanliurfa. A detailed profiling of the movement patterns have not been conducted yet. According to Support to Life ([www.supporttolife.org](http://www.supporttolife.org)) assessments and the data obtained from local sources, the breakdown of the population is as follows:

**Kirikhan:** Over 1,000 Syrian families according to local sources. Before 25 December, Kirikhan was hosting approximately 266 families (1,321 individuals) according to STL assessments. Therefore, it is estimated that Kirikhan district could now be hosting approximately 5,000 Syrian refugees.

**Reyhanlı:** According to local contacts in Reyhanlı, the refugee population in the district has experienced dramatic increases since mid-December 2012. Before 15 December, the estimated number of Syrian refugees in Reyhanlı was 15,000. The number of refugees is now estimated to be as high as 35,000 (6,000 to 7,000 families).

**Yayladağı:** STL has assessed 305 families (1,586 individuals) in the Yayladagi district. Altınözü: STL has claimed 421 families (2,315 individuals).

**Antakya Centre:** STL has estimated that there are only 58 families in Antakya city center, but this is because there are difficulties in tracking the families. Hence, STL suspects that there is a huge information gap with regard to the refugees in Antakya center.

Other: Local sources have confirmed the presence of Syrian refugees in Kumlu and Belen districts, where STL is not yet operational. Local sources note that in Kumlu there are 150 families (750 to 900 persons). STL does not have information on the figures in Belen.

According to [www.supporttolife.org](http://www.supporttolife.org) information, the breakdown of Syrians outside the camps are as follows:

**Table 2: Estimated numbers of Syrian refugees outside camps in various locations (January 2013)**

Location	STL assessment figures		Unconfirmed sources	
	Family	Individual	Family	Individual
Kirikhan	266	1,321	+1000 (est.)	+5000 (est.)
Reyhanli	53*	309*	N/A	35000 (est.)
Yayladagi	305	1,586	N/A	N/A
Altinozu	421	2,315	N/A	N/A
Antakya Centre	58*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kumlu	N/A	N/A	150 (est.)	N/A
Belen	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: [www.supporttolife.org](http://www.supporttolife.org)

\*STL has conducted only limited assessments in Reyhanli and Antakya, not covering all settlements.

STL preliminary assessment figures indicate 2% of Syrian refugees in Turkey are infants (0-12 months), while 47% of refugees are children (under 18 years of age).

### Flight Stories:

About 80% of the Syrians who fled to Turkey are from the northern provinces of Syria, mainly from Idlib, Latakia, Azaz and northern Aleppo even though there are smaller numbers of Syrians who fled from Damascus. Initially it was mostly political activist youth who fled to Turkey. Most of them live outside of the camps and stated that they had to flee because they were actively involved in the revolution and that their names were on the “black list” of the Syrian regime. They escaped from torture, imprisonment and persecution.

As the violence of the regime increased and the humanitarian conditions in Syria worsened, Syrians started to flee in massive numbers. Many Syrians who fled after the first year of the revolution have stated that they had to flee due to the worsening humanitarian situation in their home country. Either their houses were bombed and demolished or they were living in areas targeted by the regime. Furthermore, they stated that there is no heating and that it is becoming more and more difficult to find basic supplies such as bread.

Many Syrians have set out the role of kinship relations upon their arrival to Turkey. Especially in Kilis, where the economy is mostly based on smuggling, kinship relations have remained stronger over the years due to the economic relations across the borders. Many local residents of Kilis as well as displaced Syrians point at the importance of relatives as a pull factor for Syrians.

The existence of relatives and business partners across the border on the Turkish side motivated many Syrians to flee to Turkey. Initially many were welcomed by their relatives. A Syrian who currently resides in Istanbul said: “When we reached the border near Urfa, we waited there for four days. The Turkish authorities were not letting us in. Then, once the Free Army liberated the border area, the Turkish authorities opened the border and let us in. We first went to the houses of our friends in Urfa. We had met them when they were in Syria for trade, my father works in the tourism sector, so he used to meet a lot of Turks who came to Syria for tourist or trade reasons. But how long can you stay at someone else’s home as guests? So after staying with them for a month, eventually we had to rent an apartment.”

A Syrian of Turkman origin stated: “I used to study at Aleppo University. Once the demonstrations started at the University, I was one of the people that the regime was looking for. So, I escaped to Turkey. I first stayed at a relatives’ house for a month. Then I came to Istanbul. I worked on construction sites and slept there for a couple of months until I had enough money to rent an apartment with friends.”

Many others had to come to Turkey in order to get treatment at hospitals. Turkish ambulances waiting at the border to carry the wounded to the hospital closest to the border point. There are serious cases of injury, such as having lost one or more of the limbs, brain damage as well as less serious cases of injury. Some of the injured are members of the Free Syrian Army and state that as soon as they recover they will go back to Syria to fight. Non-combatants also voice their desire to go back to their homes and none have expressed any wish to stay in Turkey in the future.

A Free Syrian Army fighter, who defected from the Syrian regime’s army and is currently in Gaziantep, explained about his decision to defect as follows: “My family’s only income was my salary. That is why I had to stay in the army. I was working in communications, so I was not in a position to directly kill my own people. If I was in such a situation, I would have defected from day one. But then I could no longer bear being part of an army that was killing my family, my friends and the people of my country. So, I made the decision to defect. As soon as I defected, I got in touch with the Free Syrian Army. After being interrogated, I joined the FSA. A month after joining the FSA, some shrapnel hit me in the eye and I had to come to Turkey for an operation. As soon as my treatment here is over, I will go back to Syria to continue to fight the regime.”

A soldier defector from the regime who is currently in Hatay us about his flight: “We did not have permission to go visit our families for a year because most soldiers defect when they go to visit their families. Even talking on the phone with our families was forbidden. The only information we were getting about what is happening in Syria was through what the military was informing us. For a long time they were telling us that we were fighting Turkish and Israeli soldiers. After a year of not going home, I finally got the permission to visit my family and that is when I defected. I passed through the regime’s checkpoints with my brother’s ID card and contacted the FSA in Idlib. The FSA brought me to the Turkish border.”

Some Syrians from bordering towns such as Azaz stated that they cross the border temporarily when bombings begin and that they go back to Azaz once the bombings stop. A Syrian from Azaz, who currently resides in Kilis, stated that, they used to wait under olive trees for 12 hours with nothing to eat except dry bread. After sunset, he stated, they would go back to their homes. After being stuck in this situation for weeks, they were able to enter Turkey.

Many Syrians go back and forth between Turkey and their hometowns taking food and medicine with them into Syria and bringing back cheap cigarettes to sell in Turkey in order to make some money.

Some Syrians have stated that the wealthy Syrians were able to leave Syria during the first stages of the revolution and that they, for the most part, rented apartments in big cities such as Istanbul or Gaziantep. The poor ones, they state, stayed in Syria longer until the situation became unbearable and now they are mostly in smaller and cheaper cities such as Kilis. Those who cannot afford to rent apartments are staying in the camps. They stated that the poorest segments of the Syrian society are still inside Syria since they do not even have the means to make it to the border.

Many Syrians noted that in Turkey they are accused of being sectarian. In numerous instances they stated that until they reached the Turkish border, they hid in homes of friends from different sectarian backgrounds and that they also provided protection in their homes for Syrians from various sectarian backgrounds. They state that they are very uncomfortable with the accusation of being sectarian and that they feel like the Turkish public is trying to pull them into Turkey’s own sectarian issues. Many also point to the fact that they are aware of the reasons behind Turkish governments’ interest in Syria and that they understand that the Erdogan government is clearly supporting the Arab Sunni rebels.

### “Guest” Refugees:

Even though Turkey is a signatory of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, Turkey’s asylum policy is characterized by the “geographical limitation” with which it implements the Convention. Turkey originally accepted the Convention with both the “time” and the “geographical” limitation. With the adoption of the 1967 Protocol, Turkey lifted the “time”, but kept the “geographical” limitation implying that the Turkish state grants refugee status and the right to asylum only to “persons who have become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe.” Asylum seekers from outside of Europe are assessed in cooperation with UNHCR. Such asylum seekers are granted temporary protection until a decision is reached. Those asylum seekers who are accepted as refugees are then resettled in a third country with the support of UNHCR.

In line with the “geographical limitation” Syrians who have fled to Turkey are recognized as “guests” and not as “refugees;” and the camps where Syrians reside are officially “guest-camps,” not “refugee camps.” However, Syrians in Turkey are not treated like asylum seekers coming from other non-European countries, either. They cannot register with UNHCR in order to apply for asylum in a third country. Some Syrians who arrived Turkey in May 2011 have stated that UNHCR carried out initial interviews with them in order to start processing their files. However, later, due to a change of the policy by the Turkish state, UNHCR stopped registering Syrians. One of the interpretations of the change of policy by the Turkish government is that technically it is very difficult to process asylum applications for such a huge number of asylum seekers. Another commonly made comment by experts and journalists is that through such a policy, the Turkish government aims to prevent the interference of UNHCR or other international bodies in Turkish control over the Syrian migrant situation .

Nevertheless, the Turkish state has implemented a “temporary protection regime” for Syrians. The principles of temporary protection are:

- i. An open border policy
- ii. No forcible returns (*non-refoulement*)
- iii. Registration with the Turkish authorities and support inside the borders of the camps.

Officially, Syrians in Turkey are recognized not as refugees but as “guests.” Not being granted refugee status is an important factor that increases the vulnerability of Syrians who have fled their country for political and humanitarian reasons. Many Syrians have stated that their major complaint about the Turkish government is that they are not being granted refugee status and that “guest” status implies unpredictability about their presence in Turkey. The fear concerning the precariousness of their status is not unfounded. As a worker for one of the local authorities in Islahiye stated during my interview with him: “The guest status means that Syrians do not have rights in Turkey and that the State has the right to make the decision to deport them at any time.” In other words, the Turkish state has not carried out a policy towards Syrians based on a discourse of rights, but rather one based on “generosity.” Another official in Islahiye said: “Being a strong state means that you feel pity. The Turkish state feels pity towards Syrians and this is why we feed them and let them stay in Turkey.” Such a charitable approach rather than a rights-based approach also feeds negative public opinion in Turkey towards refugees. Many local people have expressed their discontent with the Turkish government allocating resources to Syrians instead of Turkish citizens who are in need, such as earthquake victims. Some of the words they use to define Syrians include “beggars”, “looters”, and “exploiters”.

Even though one of the principles of temporary protection is an open-door policy for Syrians, during my presence in Kilis, I observed that Syrians were not always allowed into Turkish territory through the Kilis frontier. Those Syrians who have valid passports are allowed to enter the country at all times, whereas those without passports have difficulties. Many Syrians, who have this problem, enter Turkey through crossing the minefields between Turkey and Syria, risking their lives. There have been instances of the Turkish soldiers at the border region shooting at Syrians trying to enter Turkey irregularly and injuring some in the legs. This issue, however, has not attracted much attention in the Turkish media.

Another principle of the temporary protection policy is that there are no forcible returns. Certain sources such as UNICEF have declared that some Syrians went back to their country voluntarily. However, almost all the Syrians whom I have interviewed in the Islahiye camp stated that many camp residents are either going back or are thinking of going back to Turkey due to living conditions in the camps. “Above all, living in tent camps which are not ready for winter-conditions are forcing us to go back to Syria” stated one of the Syrians. Another Syrian said: “Because of the summer heat, babies died in the Urfa camp. So, we are forced to go back to Syria.” At the Kilis border crossing, I have observed Syrians being deported since they were not content with the conditions of the camp in which they were living. They wanted to be transferred to another camp, yet other camps were all full capacity. Thus, the authorities deported them.

## **The Administrative Framework and the Camp Conditions**

Upon entering Turkey, Syrians are registered by the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) officials. Displaced Syrians then are taken to one of the refugee camps where they are given ID cards. The camps, which are run by the Turkish government in collaboration with AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent, provide Syrians with access to services that cover the basic survival needs. Syrians staying in the camps receive free food and health care.

UNHCR provides only technical support to the government for registration, identification of vulnerable groups and to adopt a community based approach in the camps. Since 2011, UNHCR has donated 28 million dollars in in kind assistance. As a sign of solidarity, UNHCR has also appealed to the international community to generate aid for displaced Syrian people.

Even though many Syrians admit that the conditions of the Syrians in Turkey are much better than in Lebanon and Jordan, those residing in the camps have numerous complaints about camp conditions. Even though food is delivered three times a day, Syrians state that most of the time the food is not edible and that there have been numerous cases of food poisoning. Syrians have demanded that they be given the ingredients and they have said that they can then cook for themselves. However, the camp authorities have rejected this request, pointing to the danger of fire in tents.

Syrians also have complaints about the distribution of basic goods such as soaps, toothpaste and baby food. Some state that the distribution is not fair and that families who are close to the camp administration receive goods while others do not. There has also been an account of Turkman families receiving more aid than Arab families. It is difficult to confirm or deny this claim though. Turkman families state that they do not receive any special treatment. Due to some tensions between Turkman and Arab Syrians, the Turkish government eventually established a separate camp for the Turkmans. This policy has been criticized by many on the grounds that it fuels sectarianism within Syrian society.

Camp residents also have complaints about translators saying that they are mostly local peasants of Arab origin. They do not speak Arabic well enough to communicate specific terminology concerning serious issues such as health problems to doctors. Camp residents also state that even though all health costs are covered by the Turkish authorities, most of the time there is a delay in supplying medicine and that there are no specialists, just general doctors.

Complaints have increased with the winter. Many Syrians have remarked that the tents are not suitable for winter weather and that are flooded each time that there is rain. As a result, some Syrians have decided to go back to Syria even though their lives are under threat. As one of the residents of the Islahiye camps stated: “The only reasons why we endure these awful conditions in the camp is that there are no planes bombing us from above.” Another camp resident has voiced his criticism of the camp conditions by saying that “The camp conditions are great if you don’t mind living like animals, but if you want to live like a human, the conditions are unacceptable.”

A camp resident said “We are in between two fires in Turkey. As displaced people we are in a vulnerable situation so we cannot voice our complaints to the Turkish authorities. Because we do not have refugee status they can decide to deport us at any time.”

Another resident said how “There are no clear rules and regulations communicated to us concerning the camp. We have seen corruption among the Turkish authorities.”

Camp residents have elected committees in order to voice concerns and complaints to the Turkish authorities. However, they state that the Turkish authorities do not take the opinions expressed by the committee into consideration at all.

In the Kilis camp, the Turkish authorities have opened nurseries and primary and secondary schools where they have adopted the curriculum of the Turkish Ministry of Education. In other camps, such as the Islahiye camp, Syrians have organized and established a school themselves where Syrian teachers residing in the camps do the teaching. There are 30 teachers and 710 students. One of the teachers states that “it took a lot of effort to persuade the Turkish authorities to let Syrians do the teaching.”

Some Syrians had complaints about the presence of Turkish soldiers at the camp gates. The soldiers are not allowed to walk around in the camp, but they are responsible for the security at the entrance. Besides hearing stories from Syrians residing in the camps, I have also observed that soldiers sometimes treat the Syrians in a non-humanitarian fashion, for example, insulting them, shouting at them and waving their guns at them. Camp residents argue that the presence of armed soldiers have negative psychological effects, especially for children, who have witnessed and escaped from violence in Syria.

The general perception is that wealthier Syrians prefer to rent apartments in the cities rather than to stay in the camps. Even though there is definitely a class division among Syrians living in the camps and living in the cities, it is important to note that there is a big number of Syrians outside the camps who are living in poverty. Even some who are able to rent apartments run out of money after a few months and have to find ways of surviving in the city. Some families live in mosques or in parks.

## **Employment of Syrians**

30 January, 2013, nine workers, two of whom were displaced Syrians, died as a result of an explosion at a galvanization factory in Gaziantep. The death of Syrian workers who were being employed at the factory without work permits brought the plight of displaced Syrians to the attention of the Turkish public. Even though it is not possible to have statistics regarding how many Syrians are being employed without any work permits and thus without any work benefits, interviews with Syrians and some local businessmen prove that increasing numbers of Syrians are forced to work under exploitative conditions, with their lives at risk. After the explosion, Fatma Şahin, Minister of Social Policy, stated that the government is aware of the fact that Syrian workers are being employed without work permits and that the government will solve this problem. She stated that Syrians are now able to get residency and soon will be able to get work permits as well.

Seasonal workers: Neither those Syrians in the camps or those residing in towns and cities are yet granted the right to work. However, once they started running out of the savings they brought with them, many had to start working in restaurants, factories, construction sites and as farm workers without social security or other benefits. Some Syrians have stated that they work in order to save money so that they can rent apartments and move out of the camp during the winter. However, it is impossible to pay rent on the wages that they are making. The average salary is 15 Turkish lira (less than 7 euros) *per* day.

I interviewed Syrians in the Islahiye camp who are working in pepper farms and factories as seasonal workers. Most are men but there are also a number of children and women working in farms and factories. Many of the workers are over qualified for the jobs they are doing; so we have law school and business school graduates picking red peppers. Many Syrians state that farm and factory

owners exploit Syrian workers due to their vulnerable situation. They also claim that employers prefer to employ Syrians over local workers since they are cheaper. This view has credibility as one of the factory owners I interviewed said: “Thanks to Bashar al Asad, we now have cheap labor.” Not only are the Turkish authorities not taking any precautions against the exploitation of refugee labor, they are actually indirectly encouraging it. Even though initially Islahiye camp residents were not allowed to leave the camp, once the red pepper season approached, they were allowed to stay outside the camp from 9am to 5pm. Early in the morning, there are hundreds if not thousands of Syrians standing in front of the camp, waiting to be picked to go to work in farms and factories. One of the officials in the Islahiye said: “We allow them to work for a few reasons. First, they are bored in the camp; by working they keep themselves busy. Second, factory owners prefer to employ Syrians since the usual seasonal workers from Urfa are difficult to deal with for the factory owners. However, Syrians have to do what the factory owners order them to do.”

**Educational Opportunities:** The Turkish government stated that Syrian university students are allowed to enroll at seven universities in the border cities without having to show proof that they used to attend universities in Syria. This policy has resulted in anti-immigrant discourses among the Turkish public accusing the Syrians of stealing educational opportunities from Turkish students. Furthermore, it will be mostly Turkman Syrians who will be able to attend universities because of language constraints: Arab Syrians will obviously have greater problems in this respect. Therefore, this policy has been criticized for positively discriminating the Turkman population.

## **Syrian Displacement and Influences on the Turkish Economy**

Gaziantep: An official visit of the Syrian Prime Minister, Nal, al Otari to Turkey in July 2004, marked the beginning of the relations between the Syrian State Planning Commission and the Turkish State Planning Organization. A regional cooperation program between the two countries was suggested as a result of this visit and the budget of the program was set at 20 million USD to be funded equally by the two countries. Subsequently, the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the Syrian authorized office approved a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a framework of cooperation. The first meeting of the regional Cooperation Program Monitoring and Steering Committee was held in Gaziantep in April 2005, during which a Joint Program Document was approved. The documents outlined agreements concerning the funding and application of infrastructure, technical cooperation, capacity developments, culture and tourism projects. The Project Coordination Unit, which has the tasks of implementing the projects, was established in Gaziantep in June 2006. Officials from the Project Coordination Unit have stated during my interviews that they had closer links with the businessmen of Aleppo rather than those of Damascus since Damascus businessmen have closer relations with the regime and thus benefit more from the “old structure.” They have also stated that the situation in Syria did not have a drastic influence on the economy of Gaziantep since Gaziantep businessmen were able to redirect their trade to Libya and Egypt. They have also stated that Gaziantep has stronger business relations with Iraq and that if such a crisis was to take place in Iraq, then the Gaziantep economy would have collapsed.

Due to the stabilization of relations between Turkey and Syria under the AKP government, many businessmen moved their factories into Syria where labor is cheaper compared to Turkey. An example is the Tekerekoğlu textile company which was moved to the Aleppo region in 2007 after a labor strike in Gaziantep. Local businessmen state that the situation in Syria had a catastrophic influence on those businesses that had factories operating inside Syria.

## **Non-Governmental Organizations and Assistance to Displaced Syrians**

**İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation:** Turkish authorities have been very strict about not allowing any independent observers, journalists, NGOs, national or international humanitarian relief organization to

enter the camps. However, Syrian accounts reveal that since the early days of the establishment of the camps, İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation had access to the camps. The exclusive İHH presence in the camps have been criticized by many based on the argument that the Turkish government is giving access to İHH since it is ideologically close to the government.

İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation has been the major foundation undertaking relief efforts for Syrians outside the camps since March 2011. İHH has provided Syrians with basic necessities such as shelter, food and healthcare. İHH has been distributing child and baby food packages, clothes, hygiene packages, wheel chairs, crutches, first aid kits, prayer sets including Qurans, prayer beads as well as linen, pillows, and blankets. Shelter aid items such as tents, containers, mats and blankets have also been distributed. According to the information I got from İHH, aid is being delivered through the İHH Coordination offices in Kilis and Reyhanlı border regions. 45% of the aid has been distributed to Syrians in Turkey and in the other bordering countries and 55% has been distributed inside Syria.

In June 2011, İHH set up a mobile kitchen that provides hot meals for 12,000 people on a daily basis. İHH officials also visited Syrian refugees being treated at various hospitals, provided them with medicine and helped with the transfer of some patients to other hospitals outside Antakya to receive better treatment. İHH helped too with the transfer of patients discharged from hospitals to the camps. İHH had a health truck providing services on the Bab al-Hawa frontier and another one on the Bab al-Salam Gate on the Syrian side of the Kilis Öncüpinar Border Gate. The health truck examined 70-80 displaced Syrians daily and distributed medicine.

İHH also carried out relief efforts on the Lebanese-Syrian border since May 2011. Inside Syria, İHH has been undertaking relief activities for internally-displaced Syrians and Palestinians.

Other than providing humanitarian relief, İHH also has been raising the issues of human rights violations in Syria at the national and international level. For example, İHH attended the meetings of the Syrian Humanitarian Aid Forums held in Geneva, 16 July 2012 under the auspices of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA). İHH also attended conventions organized with Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Arab League and the Humanitarian Forum.

Kimse Yok Mu (KYM) is a Turkish Non-Governmental Organization. KYM delivers humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees mostly in Jordan and Lebanon based because whereas the Turkish government is “fully mobilized for refugees, Syrians are in a difficult situation in Lebanon and Jordan.” After negotiating with the local authorities in Jordan, KYM donated 5.5 tons of relief supplies to Syrian refugees there. Inside Turkey, KYM donated food, clothing and blankets to 12,000 people in Antakya and to 2,000 people in Kilis. Furthermore, KYM built portable toilets, bathrooms, garbage containers and plays areas in Kilis. KYM also has a mobile kitchen in Gaziantep where hot food is served to 1,000 Syrians on a daily basis. KYM also opened a health care center in region in September 2012 which is staffed by two Syrian doctors, two nurses and two pharmacists.

Caritas started a year-long programme 1 January 2013 on the border districts of Kilis and Reyhanlı. Caritas is appealing for 1,406,801 Euros. Caritas will provide food, hygiene items, blankets and heaters to 2000 families. Caritas will also provide Syrians with medical assistance and counselling.

Civil society organizations in Diyarbakır gathered under “Diyarbakır Brotherhood Initiative for Syria” to launch an aid campaign. Organizations such as Özgür-Der, Ay-Der, the Anatolia Youth Foundation, Humanitarian Relief Association, Memur-Sen, Association to Protect the Values of Diyarbakır and İhvan-Der were all represented in this initiative. Speaking on behalf of the organizations, Hasip Yokuş stated that it is an Islamic and humanitarian duty to side with oppressed people.

İston, a construction company in Istanbul, has also announced its support for displaced Syrians and sent 1,540 blankets to Kilis to be delivered to Syrians.

Because the Turkish authorities refused permission to Doctors Without Borders to operate on Turkish territory the organization had set up field hospitals on the Syrian side of the border. Recently, however, they received the necessary permit and are currently preparing to open a clinic in Kilis.

Until about September 2012, Turkish authorities were not allowing relief initiatives by Syrian individuals or organizations. With the drastic increase in the number of Syrians, however, it became more difficult for the Turkish authorities to meet all the needs. The Turkish authorities are now then allowing Syrians to cooperate with Turkish NGOs to open humanitarian aid centers, schools and health centers. In Antakya and Gaziantep, Syrians have established their semi-official schools, with Syrian teachers who developed their own curriculums.

It is important to note that most of the non-governmental organizations provide aid to those Syrians residing outside the camps, whereas the Syrians in the camps are totally isolated and survive on what the Turkish government provides them with.

## Hatay

Of all the cities where there are camps or a concentration of Syrian population living outside the camps, Hatay deserves to be analyzed as a special case because of tensions between the local population and the Syrians. Hatay, which became part of Turkey after a referendum in 1939, has been one of the major issues of dispute between Syria and Turkey. Syria has claimed that the referendum was “suspicious”, with Turkey moving Turks into the Hatay region right before the vote. Syria claims that Hatay was illegally taken by Turkey and that it violates the unity of Syrian territory. From 2000, when Bashar Assad came to power in Syria, there was a lessening of tension between Turkey and Syria over Hatay. The Syrian government no longer actively claimed Hatay, though it had not given up its claim either. The population of Hatay is divided almost equally between Sunni Muslims and Alawi Muslims with an Arab Orthodox Christian minority. The city has remained predominantly Arab.

There have been reports of complaints about Syrians living in Hatay since July 2011. Some of the initial complaints did not target the Syrians themselves, but rather the Turkish government’s choice of camp space. Locals stated that the camps were built on grassland, creating problems for the grazing of their animals. Later, however, criticisms started directly to target Syrians.

- i. Economic Dimension: Complaints at the economic level can be categorized as the kind of anti-immigrant discourse which is prevalent in many locations where there has been a huge influx of migrants. The local population criticized the presence of Syrians living in the city based on the argument that they are causing inflation in rent prices. This criticism was common in other cities such as Kilis and Gaziantep, as well. However, some also voiced the view that it was the real estate owners who should be criticized for raising the rents and exploiting Syrians who are in a difficult position to start with. Another complaint at the economic level is that Syrians have become competitors in the labor market and they are causing the lowering of wages. Once again, some locals I interviewed criticized employers rather than Syrians by saying that employers are exploiting refugee labor.
- ii. Cultural differences: Many local residents of Hatay expressed complaints based on “differences between the urban culture of Hatay and the peasant, non-urban, uneducated background of Syrians,” as they put it. Many accused Syrians of not having manners, speaking and laughing very loudly, being uneducated, having too many children, and harassing women on the streets. At times this kind of talk bordered on hate speech towards Syrians. There were even instances of institutionalized discrimination such as not allowing Syrians to sit at the front tables at a café in the city center.
- iii. Violation of Law: Many locals have stated that Syrians refuse to pay bills at restaurants and supermarkets, and that they do not pay their rents. They have added that when asked to pay the bills, Syrians either threaten them or say “Go ask from your prime minister; he will pay

the bill.” I found it very difficult to confirm the validity of these complaints since every single person who expressed this complaint also stated: “I never saw it with my own eyes, but family and friends say so.” Therefore, it is perhaps most important to understand *why* this kind of story circulates among the local public. It is also important to note that the media also had a role in circulating and legitimizing such a discourse by telling such stories and incidents without giving references; thus reproducing an anti-immigrant discourse and strengthening anti-immigrant public opinion.

- iv. **Services:** Both in Hatay and Kilis, many locals have complained that they no longer have access to immediate treatment at hospitals since hospitals are overcrowded by Syrians. They argue that doctors have been ordered by the government to give priority to the treatment of Syrians. Although it is true that there are many cases of wounded Syrians arriving in hospitals on a daily basis, there is no centralized order to give all Syrians priority. Since many Syrians come from a war zone, it is most likely that they are emergency cases that need immediate intervention in order for the patient to survive.
- v. **Militarization of the camps and the city:** Many locals have expressed their concern about the presence of armed Syrians in the camps and in the city. They have stated that most of the Syrians are not innocent refugees or victims of war, but rather they are Islamic militants and Jihadists. Migrants’ The long beards and the style of dress are given as proof. Locals argue that neither the camps nor the apartments rented by Syrians in the city are family homes. Rather, they are military bases where Syrian and non-Syrian armed groups stay and get military training. However, according to my interviews with the local authorities in Altınözü, for example, there are 200 Syrians living in 30 houses and there are not more than two males in each household. Also my interviews with the Syrian women and elderly residing both in the camps and in the city show that the apartments rented by Syrians are family homes. They are not bases for militants.
- vi. **During interviews,** the locals from Hatay expressed their discontent with the non-transparent policies of the Turkish government and their fear of collaboration between the Erdoğan government and the Sunni Syrian rebels. Hatay has a delicate balance of Alewite and Sunnis and the Alewite residents of Hatay have openly stated that they had considered the Alewite Asad regime of Syria a safe haven if they face trouble in Turkey. Therefore, they state that the uprising in Syria is actually a conspiracy of the Turkish government and the Syrian Sunni opposition against the Alewites.
- vii. **Apaydın camp:** AKP government’s refusal to allow members of the main opposition party, CHP, to enter the Apaydın camp, popularly known as the “camp of the generals,” in August 2012 resulted in an increase in tensions in Hatay. Media and organizations critical of the Turkish government’s Syria policies argued that Turkey easily allows Al Qaeda militants to enter Syria through Turkish soil. Both CHP and the Hatay public had suspicions that the Apaydın camp was being used for training armed rebels. The Turkish government claimed otherwise and stated that Apaydın camp houses defecting soldiers, but that there is no military training in the camp. Eventually the government had to agree to let visitors enter the camp under the condition that permits were cleared with the Foreign Ministry. The parliament members who entered the camp found no weapons inside.
- viii. **I interviewed two residents of the camp from Idlib who had defected from the Syrian army and had fled to Turkey with their families.** They stated that only about 30% of the camp population (around 600 individuals) are ex-soldiers and that the rest are the families of the same. One of the Apaydın residents told us that the Free Syrian Army brought him to the border where the Turkish military jeeps picked him up and took him to the camp. He also stated that since his defection put all his family’s lives in danger, all his sisters and brothers also had to escape and come to Turkey. The second Apaydın camp resident I interviewed stated that weapons are not allowed in the camp. Defected soldiers leave their weapons at the border before they cross onto Turkish soil. Residents of the Apaydın camp can only leave the camp for emergency health

situations and to go to the market once a week on Wednesdays. In both cases, the Turkish military jeeps take them back and forth between the camp and the city. Camp residents state that this policy is being enacted in order to ensure the security of residents.

## **Anti-War Campaigns and Conclusion**

In early October 2012, mortar shells from Syria hit the town of Akçakale on the Syrian border and killed five Turkish citizens. Following the incident, 4 October, 2012, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a motion that authorizes the government to deploy armed forces in foreign countries. In the hours following the vote in the Grand Assembly, there were massive demonstrations in various cities in Turkey. The demonstrators criticized the motion for the deployment of armed forces and accused the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) of trying to pull Turkey into a war against Syria; a war which was not, according to the demonstrators, Turkey's war, but that of global, imperial powers. Many critics argued that the AKP's policy towards Syria expressed the Turkish government's collaboration with Western imperial powers against Syria and the Turkish prime-minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's desire to resurrect the Ottoman Empire. Many also state that the AKP's support of the Syrian rebels is a sign of the Turkish government's anti-Alawite policies. Syrians, however, in many instances, have declared that the revolution did not start with sectarian aims. As one of the Syrians in Hatay stated: "In Turkey they accuse us of being sectarian. The revolution is against the brutal regime, it has never been against the Alawis. Sunni and Alewis used to live together in Syria. Syrians are not fundamentalists. We are fighting against the Bath regime and after the fall of the regime, if fundamentalist come to power, we will fight against them, as well."

Many Syrians have also spoken concerning the AKP's support for Islamist powers, such as the Nusra Front, in Syria: "If the international community had spoken out against the brutalities of the regime and had supported the people against the regime, the Nusra front would not be present in Syria today. The longer this war continues the stronger the Nusra front will get because they know how to fight. But, it does not mean that we will accept their rule in Syria after the regime falls. We will spend years rebuilding our country. Not only the buildings, homes, mosques and churches which are destroyed, but our society needs to be rebuilt. We will fight against all political forces – internal and foreign – that try to rule us by force and against our dignity. We want a Syria where every Syrian has equal rights."

Many Syrians have argued that it is not the Syrian people, but the regime, which has fuelled sectarianism in Syria. A displaced Syrian from Homs, who is currently residing in Hatay, tells about the role of the regime in creating sectarianism: "It is the Syrian regime and external powers which benefit from sectarianism. Therefore, together with the regime, the Salafis will also collapse because both have the same interests: to control our people, politics and the capital. In Homs, the demonstration started first in a village where the Sunni, Alwaites, Ismailis and the Murshidis live together. Then we had a demonstration in the city of Homs on 23 March, 2011. Our slogan was "down with the governor!" The authorities immediately used tear gas against us. Then on 26 March, one person was shot during a demonstration. This triggered even bigger demonstration. People had the feeling "If someone is killing me, then it means I am right." Once the demonstration got bigger, the regime started to establish checkpoints between Sunna, Alawite and Christian villages in order to create sectarianism. While our slogans were "Freedom, Fredeom, Christians and Muslims together for Freedom", the regime was creating sectarianism by trying to inflict fear among the Christians and the Alawites that the Sunni want to kill them. The regime itself killed Alawis and told them that the Sunnis killed them and also killed Sunnis and told them that the Alawites killed them. "

Very few of the demonstrators and critics denounced the extreme violence used by the Asad regime while criticizing the policies of the Turkish government. The failure to say "No to Asad" by most of the opposition in Turkey meant Syrians criticised these movements. Many of the Syrian activists I have interviewed have expressed their concern that they are being exploited and being pulled into the internal politics of Turkey.