

# Toward Long-Term Solidarity with Syrian Refugees? Turkey's Policy Response and Challenges

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Laura Batalla & Juliette Tolay



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ISBN-13: 978-1-61977-558-9

*Cover photo:* Hands of Syrian children, Syrian volunteers and Turkish therapists at the end of a group post-trauma therapy session using a parachute for movement therapy at Maya Foundation in Istanbul. Photo credit: Maya Foundation

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*The Atlantic Council extends a special thanks to Limak Holding for its valuable contribution to this initiative, without whose support this report would not have been possible.*

September 2018

# CONTENTS

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Introduction	2
Seven years of policy experimentation	3
The diverse actors of a multifaceted approach	8
Syrians' lives in Turkey: the temporary protection regime	15
Future prospects of Syrian refugees in Turkey	19
Conclusions and recommendations	21
About the Authors	26
Acknowledgements	27

## INTRODUCTION:

Since 2014, Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population, which currently stands around four million registered refugees. Although the number of non-Syrian refugees has risen sharply since 2010, the large majority of refugees are coming from Syria, ravaged by its civil war since 2011. Over 3.5 million Syrian refugees are registered in Turkey, and the actual figure could be much higher. While Turkey has received important immigration influx in the past, the scale and the pace of the mass arrival of Syrians is unprecedented for Turkey, its government, and society. Over the last 7 years, Turkey has put in place a number of policies to address this challenge.

There are several discourses circulating regarding Turkey's response to the influx of Syrian refugees. Many voices have praised Ankara not only for its resilience facing such an influx, but also for the open door policy, the quality of camps, and the positive steps taken toward assisting Syrians in need. Other voices, however, have been much more critical and have focused on the shortcomings of Turkey's approach, highlighting the lack of full refugee status given to Syrians, the documented human rights violations, and the risks of politically instrumentalizing the situation. In response, Turkish officials have long complained about insufficient recognition of the effort accomplished and

the lack of international solidarity to assist Syrians and Turkey.

This report aims at moving beyond these overly simplified discourses. Contradictory assessments of Turkey's approach partly stem from existing differences between, on the one hand, the public rhetoric and official policies and, on the other hand, the official policies and their actual implementation. In addition, over the last 7 years, the Turkish approach has evolved, invalidating former truth. Similarly, it can be misrepresentative to talk about "a" Turkish approach to Syrian refugees, given that many different state and non-state actors, including some international actors, are involved in the different activities, in a more or less coordinated manner. Finally, from legal status to education, from health to work and future prospects, there are many different facets of Syrian refugee lives that are affected by how migration management is handled. Accordingly, this report traces back the different phases of the Turkish response to the arrival and settlement of Syrian refugees; then it maps the principal actors involved in Syrian refugees management in Turkey, and highlights the roles played by each; finally, the report offers some details as to how policies in place affect different aspects of refugees lives, both now and in their future, and proposes options to address some of the main challenges.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we use the commonly used term of Syrian "refugees," often referred to as such in public discussions in Turkey and across the world. However, it is important to note here that Syrians in Turkey are not recognized under the formal status of "refugees." According to the geographical limitation of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, only individuals coming from Europe can be considered as "refugees" (Turkey is one of the very few countries parties to the Convention who has not lifted this limitation). Since 2014, non-European refugees (who successfully lodge an asylum application in Turkey) are considered as "conditional refugees." However, as will be detailed below, Syrians were given yet another status and are officially referred to as "individuals under Temporary Protection." Official discourses also often refer to them as "guests." But in daily discussions, Syrians are referred to as refugees or asylum-seekers even in Turkey.

## SEVEN YEARS OF POLICY EXPERIMENTATION

In order to understand the evolution of the arrival of Syrian refugees into Turkey, and the responses proposed by the Turkish authorities, three main phases can be distinguished. While the early months have seen a great deal of improvisation, it laid the ground to the main pillars of the Turkish response: an open door policy and temporary protection status. Over the next few years, this improvised policy became consolidated in discourse and in law, but its operationalization and implementation proved more challenging, mostly due to the ever higher number of Syrian individuals entering the country. But since 2015, while there is some consistency in the open and welcoming discourse of the authorities, the complexities of domestic and international politics have led to a less visible undoing of the open door policy, and to a hesitant transition toward a more long-term approach to the question.

### 2011: Improvisation on a welcoming, humanitarian approach

The first phase covers the very early months of the Syrian crisis when the March 2011 demonstrations in Syria turned to an organized and armed conflict. Since April 2011 a number of Syrian nationals started to cross the border into Turkey in order to take refuge. At the time, there was no strong incentive for the Turkish authorities to articulate a clear asylum policy toward these early refugees: dialogue was still ongoing with President Assad; the visa-free agreement signed between Turkey and Syria two years earlier allowed for the easy entrance of Syrians; and the assumption was that the numbers would remain low and the duration of their stay limited, impending a soon-to-follow return. The Turkish Red Crescent provided first aid assistance and temporary accommodation to some of them. Other Syrians were able to live with acquaintances and on their own savings. Nevertheless, recognizing the uniqueness of the situation, AFAD (the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) started to first build refugee camps for Syrians as early as midsummer 2011.

In October 2011, Turkey's Ministry of Interior announced that Syrian refugees would be granted the status of "temporary protection" (TP). Little precision was offered as to what this status meant exactly, generating a lot of confusion over the following months, but in practice offered a collective, blanket and immediate protection in Turkey to individuals fleeing Syria. This also prevented them from applying to the regular individual asylum procedure.

At the discursive level, after Turkey's policy reversal of November 2011 on Syria, a clear discourse toward Syrian populations started to develop: one that vindicated a proactive welcome, an open border and open door approach, and a focus on humanitarian needs. For the following year or so, however, this policy of openness remained conditional on a relatively low number of refugees: as late as August 20, 2012, the then Turkish Foreign Minister stated that Turkey would remain open to Syrian refugees until they reach the number of 100,000, implying that once this number is reached, there would be limitations put to the seemingly free entrance of Syrians.

This initial response to Syrian refugees was unusual for Turkey. Twenty years earlier, when facing the mass influx of Iraqi refugees, Ankara's response had been more restrictive. Turkey's openness in 2011 signaled an important change in Turkish approach to asylum, as well as its wish to set an example for the rest of the world. Early on indeed, Turkey refused or kept its distance from international help in an attempt to show that it could handle the situation on its own.

### 2012-14: Crafting a policy based on open door, camps, and temporary protection

By October 2012, the one-hundred thousand threshold is reached, and the numbers will only increase exponentially in the years to come. But rather than changing Turkey's openness, we only see a consolidation of this discourse in policy and in practice. In this second phase, roughly covering the years 2012, 2013,

and 2014, there is an interesting and rather successful exercise of policy crafting.

The asylum policy that emerges in this period for Syrian refugees relies heavily on the idea of open border and open door. Early on in the conflict, Syrians were able to enter freely into Turkey, whether or not they had appropriate identification, and whether or not they were crossing at an official border gate. Syrians are also guaranteed a right of nonrefoulement (i.e., not to be forcefully turned back to Syria). Nevertheless, and as early as 2012, occasional temporary closures of the border, or of specific border gates, were reported.<sup>2</sup>

Another central feature of Turkish policy toward Syrian refugees during this phase is the construction of numerous refugee camps. By the end of 2014, AFAD has built 23 camps (officially called temporary accommodation centers), hosting 230,000 Syrian refugees, and providing amenities that received the high praise of the international community.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, AFAD built 26 such camps. While accommodation was provided in the camps, there was no obligation for Syrians to reside there, and camps residents were mostly free to move in and out of the camps.

At the same time, Turkey was able to capitalize on a new comprehensive immigration law passed in April 2013 (and implemented a year later): the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP). The initial impetus for this new law predated the Syrian crisis. But the later phases of drafting would happen concurrently with the arrival of Syrians, which influenced some of the articles. In practice, it creates a legal basis for the TP status (alongside the other statuses of individual international protection: conventional, conditional, and subsidiary).

LFIP provides a legal grounding to the TP status, but it is the Temporary Protection Regulation of October 2014 (together with the AFAD Circular on Healthcare and other Services for Syrians a year earlier in September 2013) that will clarify the content of the TP status for Syrians. Taking inspiration from the European Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC), the Turkish TP status provides the following

“The complexities of domestic and international politics have led to a less visible undoing of Turkey’s open door policy.”

rights and services: respect of nonrefoulement principle, access to health and welfare services, access to education, access to the labor market, and access to services for people with special needs.

This phase represents a climax for Turkey’s Syrian refugee policy. A clear, open, welcoming and humanitarian policy is formulated and put in place. Many refugees express their gratefulness of the rights and services offered. The Turkish population demonstrates a high-level of acceptance of this new population. And while Turkey complains that other countries, such as EU Member States, fall short of their contribution, or at least recognition of Turkey’s commendable efforts, many key actors of the international community recognize and praise Turkey’s approach to Syrians. With the consolidation of the policy toward Syrian refugees, and the accompanying rising cost, Ankara also opens up more to international actors and observers, and Ankara becomes more insistent in its call for more solidarity.

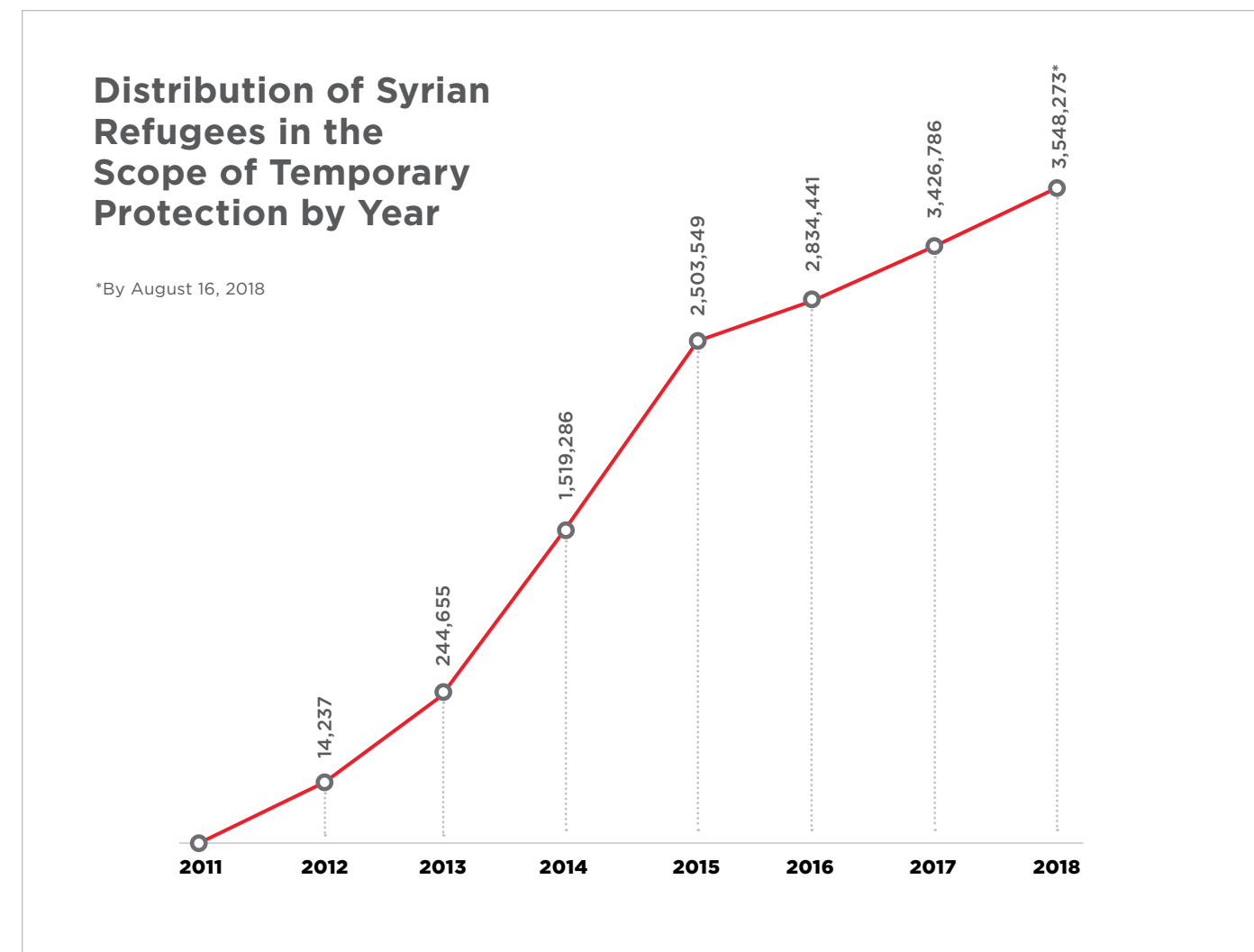
This policy success, however, is predicated on the “temporary” stay of Syrians in Turkey, as well as on the stabilization of the number of Syrians in Turkey. It was also without taking into account the increasingly complicated context of Turkish foreign policy.

### 2015-present: Responding to the challenges of long-term settlement and foreign policy developments

Indeed, starting from the second half of 2014, a number of new challenges start to appear that will force Turkey to rethink and adapt its approach to Syrian refugees. These new challenges revolve around three main axes.

2 Human Rights Watch, “Iraq/Jordan/Turkey: Syrians Blocked from Fleeing War,” July 1, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/01/iraq/jordan/turkey-syrians-blocked-fleeing-war>.

3 Mac McClelland, “How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp,” the New York Times, February 13, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html>.



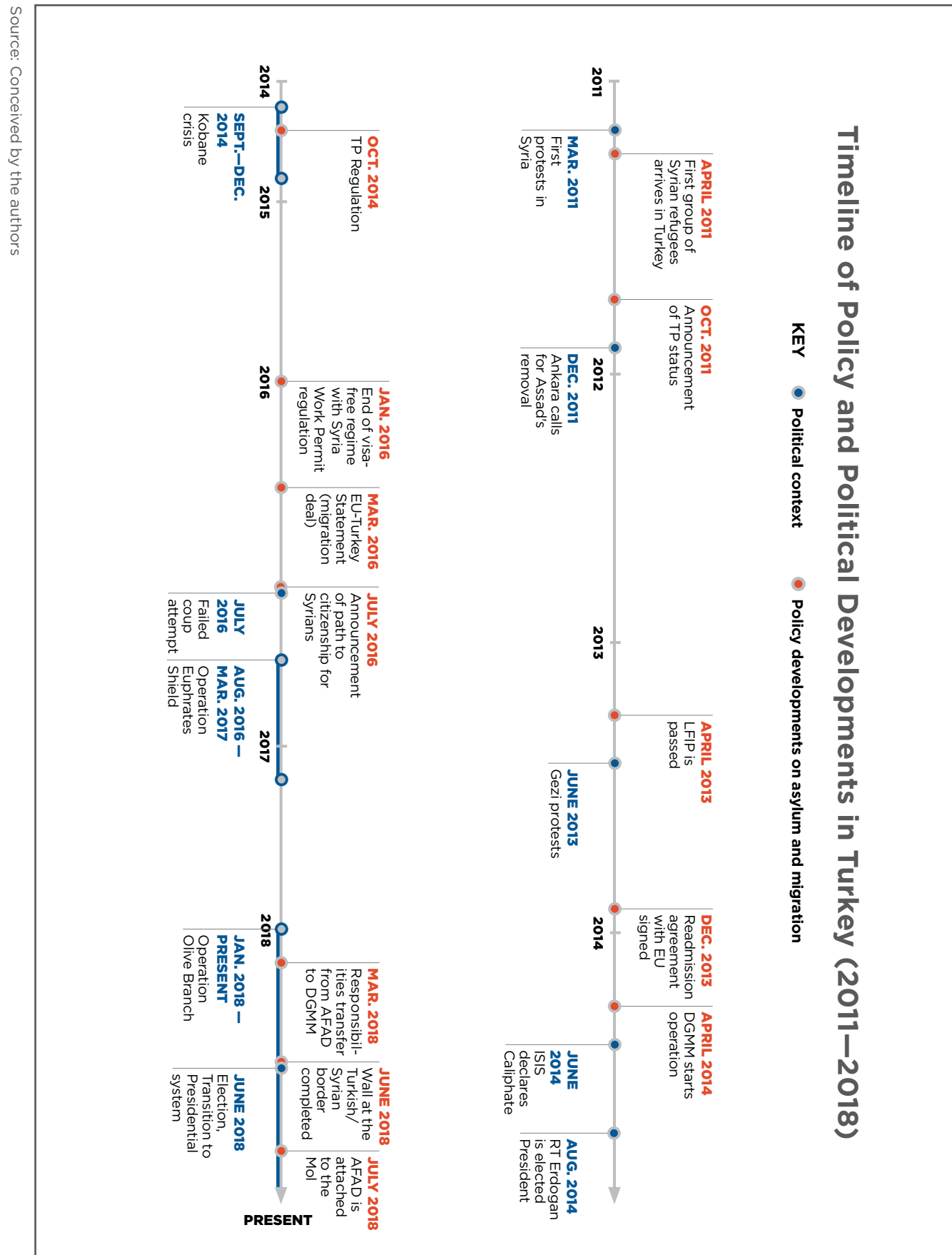
Source: DGMM/UNHCR

The first one is the rise and expansion of ISIS in territories bordering Turkey throughout 2014 and 2015. While Turkey intends to keep the border “open” for refugees, this also means that terrorists, such as Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) members, can take advantage of this openness.<sup>4</sup> ISIS’ push, together with the awakening of the Syrian Kurdish movement, creates for Ankara a complicated security situation. Eventually, by 2016, Ankara decides to more systematically close the border to better control who is crossing. In practice it means the sealing of the border outside of border gates, the construction of a wall at the border (partially completed as of June 2018) and in January 2016, the

reinstatement of visa requirements for Syrian nationals (coming by air or by sea). Despite all of these, the Turkish government sustains that Syrian nationals in need are still able to come into Turkey, but have to do so through border gates and after being scrutinized for security reasons by border guards. And indeed, while the number of Syrians have continued to increase—most likely indicating that many Syrians can still enter Turkey—there are also increased reports of Syrians who are being pushed back at the border and unable to enter.<sup>5</sup> On paper, Turkey reverted its open border policy but sustained its open door policy. In practice however, even the open door policy is applied with significant

4 Tim Arango and Eric Schmitt, “A Path to ISIS, Through a Porous Turkish Border,” The New York Times, March 9, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/10/world/europe/despite-crackdown-path-to-join-isis-often-winds-through-porous-turkish-border.html>.

5 Human Rights Watch, “Turkey/Syria: Border Guards Shoot, Block Fleeing Syrians,” February 3, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/03/turkey/syria-border-guards-shoot-block-fleeing-syrians>.



Source: Conceived by the authors

restrictions and does not always seem to be applied consistently.

The second main challenge that Turkey is facing follows partially from the rise of ISIS and concerns the acceleration of the number of Syrians coming into Turkey. In October 2015, two million Syrian refugees were registered in Turkey, two-and-a-half million in January 2016, three million in June 2017, and three and half million by February 2018. In practice, this means two important developments: the existing camps can only host a very small fraction of Syrians living in Turkey (only 6 percent in 2018) with the overwhelming majority of Syrians living as urban refugees. Effectively, this renders Turkey's camp policy, while still very important and expensive, quite insufficient given the size of the challenge. In addition, the level of frustration—if not conflict—between the local population and Syrians increases.

Finally, the duration of the crisis, and the lack of end in sight, increasingly highlights the third main challenge, which is the need to find a long-term, durable solution for Syrians. This requires moving beyond the short-term emergency temporary assistance policy that had framed the Turkish approach so far. As detailed below, Ankara has accordingly been considering and mentioning the three common long-term solutions envisioned for refugees: voluntary returns, resettlement, and integration.

Facing these new and very serious challenges, the evolving international context has also provided some new opportunities for Turkey. In particular, the Mediterranean migration management crisis

“The March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement presents a new orientation of Ankara’s approach to migration management, who accepts to help manage and control the EU external border.”

of 2015-16 presented a chance for Turkey to give new impetus to its relationship with the EU and collaborate more on migration. The March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement (aka EU-Turkey migration deal) presents a new orientation of Ankara’s approach to migration management, who accepts to help manage and control the EU external border, and to prevent Syrians (among other migrants) to move onward to the EU, in exchange for more financial contributions from the European Union (EU), as well as other important political gains unrelated to migration.<sup>6</sup> It also sheds light on Ankara’s tendency to link Syrians with other foreign policy purposes, as also evident in the mutual influence of Ankara’s refugees policies and politico-military projects in Syria (in particular in Fall 2014, and since 2016). In the areas under Turkish military control in Syria (such as Jarablus, Al-Bab, Afrin), there are reports both of Syrian refugee camps set up by Turkish actors, as well as settlement of Syrian refugees returning to Syria from Turkey.<sup>7</sup>

6 The EU-Turkey statement envisions new impetus on issues that have long been on the table: the restart of Turkey’s accession process, an updating of the customs union, and visa-free travel for Turkish nationals in the EU Schengen zone.

7 Al-Jazeera, “Turkey to set up refugee camps near Syria’s Idlib,” March 6, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/turkey-set-refugee-camps-syria-idlib-180306093813355.html>; Zeynep Bilgehan, “Some 150,000 Syrians have returned from Turkey,” Hurriyet Daily News, May 1, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/some-150-000-syrians-have-returned-from-turkey-131108>.

## THE DIVERSE ACTORS OF A MULTIFACETED APPROACH

As the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey grew, an increasing number of actors entered into the scene. A myriad of actors at different levels have provided a multi-layered response to the refugee situation. In this section, an overview of the role of actors at the local, national, international and nongovernmental organization (NGO) level will be provided in order to exemplify the range of efforts in addressing the refugee challenge.

### Top-level political leadership: a strong political will

Before mentioning the operational role played by different institutions, it is also important to recognize the role played by the top-political leadership who, from the beginning of the crisis, have articulated a very clear and unambiguous discourse emphasizing the need to welcome Syrians. They have invested significant political and symbolical capital into this issue, and given the centralized nature of Turkish politics, this has ensured compliance to the welcoming policy at all levels of the governing party. At the same time, however, this has also led to a certain level of politicization of the issue, as this Syrian policy articulated at the top was never fully debated in parliament or with other political parties. As a result, Syrians are now closely associated with the government, which had led opposition parties to criticize the welcoming policy and to lack on their own moral commitment toward refugees.

### National level: the central role of AFAD and DGMM

At the national level, two main agencies have been in charge of the Syrian refugee population. AFAD (tied to the Prime Minister's Office until June 2018—now attached to the Ministry of Interior) was the main coordinating agency early on in the crisis, but, over time, has been transferring responsibilities to DGMM (the Directorate General for Migration Management, an agency attached to the Ministry of Interior). Kızılay, the Turkish Red Crescent, has also played an

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important role complementing AFAD and DGMM.

Since the outbreak of the war in Syria, AFAD has provided different types of humanitarian aid to Syrians in Turkey but also within Syrian borders. But AFAD's signature policy contribution has been the building and management of the refugee's camps. As of July 2018, there are nineteen camps spread across ten provinces bordering Syria in southern Turkey which accommodate a total of 210,177 refugees. The camps are equipped with schools, hospitals, and athletic facilities and have received the praise of the international community for their high standards of quality.

Beside the camps, the Temporary Protection Regulation of 2014 designated AFAD as “the coordinating agency in charge of the delivery of services by the relevant Ministries and public institutions in the fields of health care, education, access to labor market, social benefits

and assistance, and interpretation.”<sup>8</sup> According to Anatolia News Agency, AFAD has spent roughly 2 billion USD, with an additional half-a-billion cost for the depreciation of the land on which the camps are.

In the meantime, DGMM, an agency fully dedicated to migration was created when LFIP was adopted in April 2013.<sup>9</sup> The Directorate General was conceived as a regular and permanent agency with the mission to develop, implement, and coordinate policies and strategies related to migration and regulate the status of foreign nationals in Turkey.

Early on, DGMM was designated as the competent authority to identify which foreigners are eligible for TP in Turkey, and whether they shall be referred to the camps or not, as well as to conduct refugee registration and documentation through its Provincial Departments for Migration Management (PDMM) established in the 81 provinces of Turkey. The Directorate General has collected biometric data, including fingerprints, during registration and maintained electronic files in an internal database for each beneficiary.

Earlier in the crisis, a majority of the Syrian refugees staying outside the camps remained unregistered and unidentified. This situation made it easier for them to move freely within the country and more difficult to know in which province were they living in or whether they had moved outside of Turkey. As a result, the Turkish government decided to introduce controls and limitations on the movement of Syrians within Turkey. As of 2016, Syrians are required to live in the province they are registered: accordingly, they can only benefit from certain services (health, work, etc.) in that province. This move was also partly in response to the enactment of the EU-Turkey Statement, as it intended to prevent refugees seeking to travel to Western regions in order to cross from Turkey to the EU.

As the number of refugees increased, and the settlement of Syrians in Turkey became a permanent reality, the Turkish authorities realized that the challenge now lies in providing a sustainable livelihood for refugees living outside the camps on their own means. Given AFAD's focus on emergency, it became clear that DGMM would be a better fit to coordinate efforts relating to the accommodation of Syrians in

### BOX 1: Focus on the Turkish Coast Guard

Together with other border security forces, the Turkish Coast Guard, affiliated to the Ministry of Interior, has been another crucial actor in the management of irregular migration in coordination with other national authorities. In 2015, the Aegean Sea became the scenario of hope and tragedy, with more than one million migrants making their way into Europe through Turkey. In this context, the Turkish Coast Guard's mission has been to protect, prevent, and deter irregular migrants from undertaking a perilous journey which often ended up in unwanted fatalities, while combating the illegal smuggling migrant networks.

While everyone remembers Alan Kurdi, a three-year old Syrian, whose lifeless body washed ashore in the Aegean coastal town of Bodrum in 2015, it is less known that the Turkish Coast Guard was able to rescue his father. The Turkish Coast Guard in cooperation with the Turkish Navy has been able to substantially decrease the number of casualties at sea.

As a result of EU-Turkey collaboration under the migration deal, the number of irregular migrants who crossed to the Aegean islands from 2015 to 2018 experienced a sharp decrease of 97 percent. While there were 2,347 irregular daily crossings on average in 2015, the number went down to 79 in 2017 and 74 at present. Despite these figures, more improvement needs to be worked on as factors encouraging some border crossings have not ceased to exist. Ironically, the Turkish Coast Guard has emphasized that some of FRONTEX and Greek Coast Guard operations create a magnet effect for migrants by reducing the distance to be crossed before being rescued.

Turkey. Consequently, as of March 2018, the overall coordination and the management of the camps, as well as the reimbursement of refugees' medication costs, have been transferred to DGMM. In the months to come, DGMM is expected to announce a holistic harmonization strategy for Syrian refugees which aims to address their long-term needs.

While the increasing transfer of responsibilities to DGMM makes sense from an institutional point of view, it remains a great challenge for a new agency who needs to establish itself in the realm of migration

<sup>8</sup> Temporary Protection Regulation, National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, October 22, 2014, Article 26 (4), accessed at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56572fd74.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Law on Foreigners and International Protection, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management, April 2014, Article 103, available at [http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng\\_minikanun\\_5\\_son.pdf](http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf).



A Turkish Coast Guard official during a rescue operation in the Aegean Sea. Credit: Turkish Coast Guard Command

management, create provincial departments all around the country, find and train appropriate staff, manage the regular immigration, and asylum inflows in Turkey, and handle the unprecedented load of managing the Syrian population.

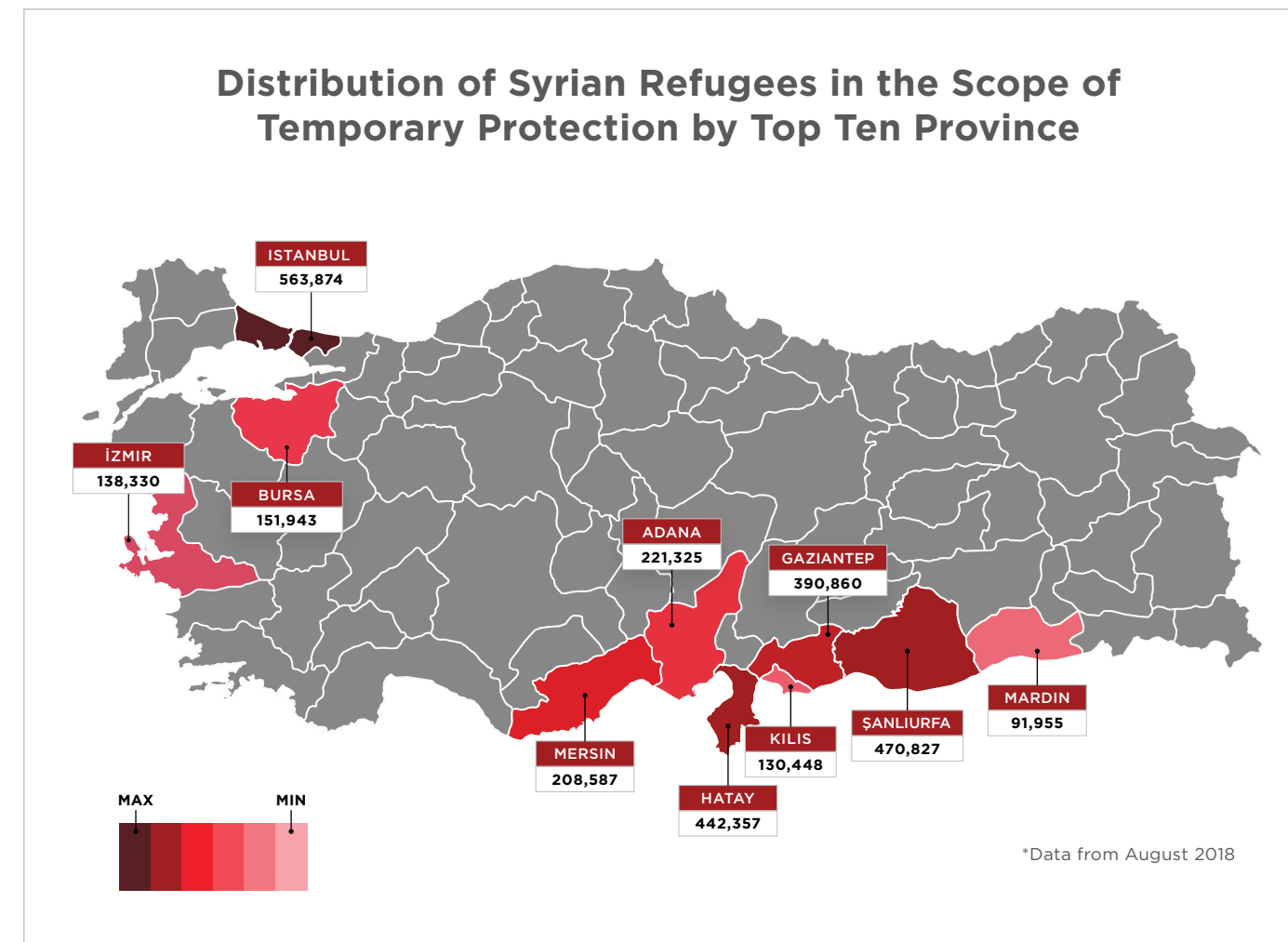
DGMM does not work alone though. Aside from DGMM and AFAD, many different ministries are involved in the overall Turkish response. Accordingly, in 2017, a Migration Policies Board was set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of Interior, in order to discuss policies and strategy and coordinate the activities of the eleven ministries involved.<sup>10</sup> Some of these ministries, like the Ministries of Health, of Education, of Labor, Social Services, and Family,

have also been directly involved in addressing refugee needs by providing free health care services, educational activities, work permit and assistance to Syrian refugees. Other agencies attached to the Ministry of Interior has also been involved, such as the role played by the military and the Coast Guard at the border (see box 1).

**Local level: the municipalities' improvised role**

While AFAD has focused a lot of its activities in the camps, and DGMM has been busy establishing itself and registering millions of Syrians, Turkish municipalities have been at the forefront of the refugee response. They have been providing all

<sup>10</sup> The Ministries involved are: the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Ministry of Labor and Social Security (now combined in Ministry of Labor, Social services and Family), the Ministry for European Union (now under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Transport, as well as the President of the Presidency of the Turks Abroad and Related Communities and DGMM.



Source: Directorate General of Migration Management

“Municipalities have been providing all kinds of assistance to Syrian refugees and they often had to act outside the limits of their responsibilities.”

outside the limits of their responsibilities, as their role lacks legal backing. No reference is made to municipalities in LFIP except for article 96 where coordination with local authorities on harmonization policies is envisioned. As a result, municipalities have lacked adequate funding. More than half of the municipalities' budget comes from national transfers, which are calculated according to the population of the municipality and its gross domestic product (GDP). Yet foreign residents—i.e., Syrian refugees—are not counted in the population total. This is particularly problematic for those municipalities that host large number of refugees.

kinds of assistance to refugees and worked with local organizations in order to address the most pressing needs of the new Syrian residents.

While 94 percent of refugees live outside of camps, they are not evenly distributed across the territory and tend to be concentrated in border regions, as well as wealthy and prosperous cities like Istanbul. The cities hosting the highest population of Syrians are: Istanbul (563,874, the equivalent of 4% of the

However, municipalities have often had to act



population), Şanlıurfa (470,827, 24%), Hatay (442,357, 28%), Gaziantep (390,860, 19%), Mersin (208,587, 12%), Adana (221,325, 10%), Bursa (151,943, 5%), Kilis (130,448, 96%), Izmir (138,330, 3%) and Mardin (91,955, 11%). In some of these cities, the percentage of refugees equals or exceeds 20 percent of the total population, like the case of Şanlıurfa, Hatay, and Gaziantep. An extreme case is Kilis, where the refugee population roughly equals the local population.

While the services provided by the different municipalities—ranging from providing first-need goods to legal counseling services—have been similar in nature, some are more advanced in their institutional capacity than others. Gaziantep (see box 2), Şanlıurfa, and Adana, have established a migration directorate within the municipality in order to coordinate and better manage all the refugee-related actions and initiatives. Similarly, Sultanbeyli district in Istanbul has created its own registration system and established an NGO in order to be able to apply for funds. But while a lot of attention is put on these more visible municipalities, others are facing difficulties in addressing the settlement of Syrians.

Among the enduring challenges identified by municipalities are the need for more accommodation and infrastructure facilities, especially relating to education and health, as well as water and waste management. Hence the crucial importance of providing municipalities with adequate resources in order to address these challenges.

### NGOs and international organizations: filling the gap?

During the early years of the crisis, Turkey chose to manage the inflow of refugees by its own means without asking for help from international organizations or NGOs, as the government believed the crisis would not last long. The United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees (UNHCR), followed by other UN agencies, were only granted access to the camps in 2012 and in early 2014 their activities were still limited to providing technical support. Aside from the Turkish Red Crescent which was responsible for providing shelter and food under the coordination of AFAD, the first Turkish NGO able to obtain access to the refugee camps was the Humanitarian Aid Foundation (IHH).

However, as the number of refugees became bigger, Turkey realized it could not handle the situation on its own. The United Nations was the first to offer help

#### BOX 2: Focus on Gaziantep municipality

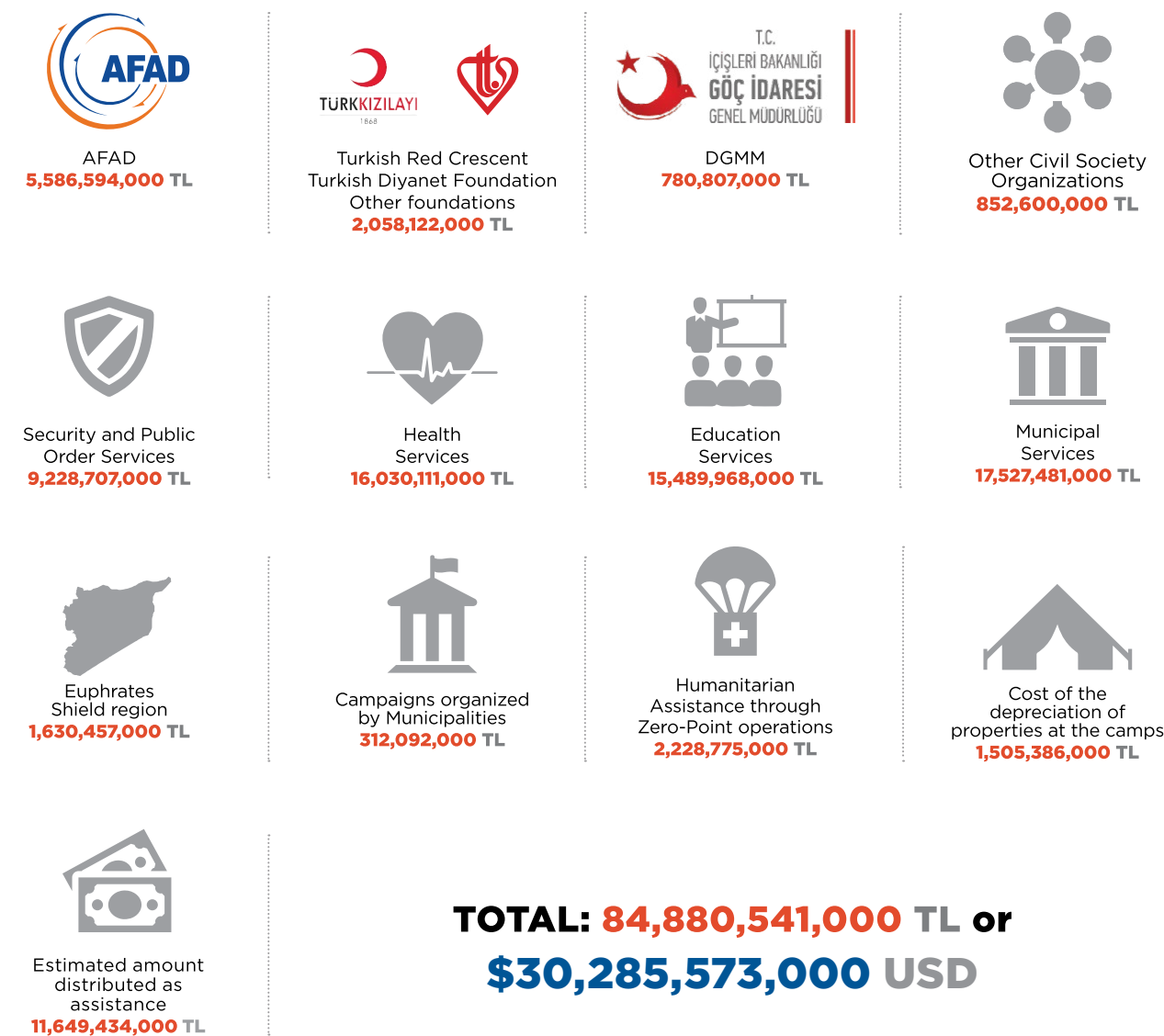
- Gaziantep is the fourth city in Turkey hosting the largest number of refugees. With a population of over two million people, Gaziantep hosts 390,860 refugees representing 19% of its host community. Only 22,482 of them live in the camps located within Gaziantep's province.
- The early realization that the Syrian refugee influx was not a short-term but a permanent situation has constituted the basis of Gaziantep's comprehensive refugee policy developed over the years.
- Under the mayor's vision, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality has not only provided the same public services to refugees as to the host community but it has also developed a model based on a peaceful coexistence between the two in order to avoid isolation and radicalisation.
- Gaziantep has been the first to establish a migration directorate within the municipality structure and has also created new institutions in order to respond to the increased needs of refugees. Some of these include Temporary Education Centers, vocational training facilities, women shelters and a municipal hospital.
- All these efforts have required an investment of 36 million USD, while UN Agencies have contributed with 8 million more. Gaziantep's case not only constitutes an example to other Turkish municipalities but also to other countries as a successful model for refugee integration from a local perspective.
- Other municipalities that are often seen as models of local refugee policies are Urfa, Adana and Sultanbeyli (in Istanbul). These municipalities have been able to gain substantial support from funding agencies, while others are been left on the sideline.

and has become one of the most active partners in contributing to the Turkish response to refugees since 2015, through its different agencies, such as the UNHCR, the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labor Organization (ILO), etc.

The refugee situation has equally attracted an increasing number of national and international NGOs wishing to work in Turkey and provide assistance to refugees. There is however a lack of information among the Turkish authorities about the number of NGOs present in Turkey and the specific activities they

## Turkey's Estimated Spending on Syrian Refugees since 2012

Translation of spending from Turkish authorities (as of December 2017)



Source: Anatolian News Agency <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/info/infografik/8044>

are engaged in. In the border province of Gaziantep alone there were approximately 150 NGOs operating in 2015, including international ones. This number is not believed to have substantially changed in the last three years.

International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) have tried to fill the gap left by government institutions and international organizations in providing aid to

refugees living mainly outside the camps. Some NGOs have however cited difficulty when registering and obtaining residence and work permits for foreign workers. There have been reported cases of wrongdoing involving (I)NGOs which have resulted in administrative fines for failing to comply with the Turkish legislation on work permits of foreigners and social security. In more extreme cases, some (I)NGOs

have been closed due to irregularities in their statute or as a result of emergency decrees. While the number of (I)NGOs working with Syrians increased until 2015, the number started to decrease again since 2016.<sup>11</sup>

### The EU and FRiT: a late but needed help

Among international donors, the European Union plays a central role. In 2015, the European Union agreed to step up its financial engagement to support Turkey in its efforts to host refugees. The EU has since become the largest contributor to Turkey, mostly through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT). But Turkey has also received contributions from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Germany, the United States, KfW Development Bank, Japan, Norway, Canada, Qatar, Sweden, etc.

As part of the EU-Turkey Statement, FRiT became the coordination mechanism to financially assist Syrian refugees living in Turkey. The Facility is endowed with 6 billion EUR split in two installments. The first installment has been fully contracted with 72 projects signed and nearly 2 billion EUR disbursed. The remaining 1 billion EUR will be paid in 2021, once the last project is completed. At the end of June 2018, the second tranche of 3 billion EUR of the Facility was approved.

The projects financed through the Facility address the urgent needs of refugees and host communities in Turkey. These projects range from construction of schools and hospitals to the payment of teachers' salaries. The flagship program has been the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), a program launched in November 2016 by the WFP, the Turkish Red Crescent, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, under the coordination of AFAD, which has

provided monthly direct cash transfers (120 TL per family member, about 25 USD) through debit cards to 1.3 million refugees out of employment to address their everyday needs.

Refugee families receive an additional bimonthly cash transfer in exchange for sending their children to school. This program is implemented through a close partnership between the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Ministry of National Education, AFAD, the Red Crescent, and UNICEF and had reached 360,000 refugee children by August 2018.

Given the long-term nature of the refugee situation and the need for more development assistance, investments under the second tranche of the Facility will focus more on inclusion and self-resilience. The priority will be put on helping to foster social cohesion between the refugees and the host communities in Turkey and increasing the employment opportunities of refugees. The second tranche of the Facility will be the last and its implementation will end in 2025. The European Commission has already started to work with the Turkish authorities in order to guarantee the sustainability of the interventions after the phasing out of the Facility.<sup>12</sup>

All in all, a great number of actors have been involved in managing the Syrian refugee crisis. It is hard to assess the amount of effort that has been put into it. From a financial point of view, Turkish authorities estimate that Turkey has spent 31 billion USD for refugees in the last seven years. This number would include the cost of camps, public order, health and education services, but also the spending of municipalities, Turkish NGOs, and Turkish individuals' contribution.<sup>13</sup> The 6 billion EUR committed by the EU, and the 600,000 USD spending from the US<sup>14</sup> estimate, pale in comparison to the Turkish numbers.

<sup>11</sup> Ryby Mellen, Colum Lynch, "Inside Turkey's NGO purge", Foreign Policy, August 3, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/03/inside-turkeys-ngo-purge/>.

<sup>12</sup> For an overall allocation of the projects funded by the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey as of June 4, 2018 see: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility\\_table.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility_table.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> "Suriyeliler için harcanan maliyetin analizi", Anadolu Agency, December 6, 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/info/infografik/8044>.

<sup>14</sup> As of September 2017, the United States announced it had spent \$572,000 in Turkey as part of its humanitarian assistance in response to the Syrian crisis, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/09/274360.htm>.

## SYRIANS' LIVES IN TURKEY: THE TEMPORARY PROTECTION REGIME

### Temporary protection status:

The legal status of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been a source of constant debate. When the first Syrian refugees arrived in 2011, Turkey chose to refer to them as "guests." At the time, the common belief was that the situation would be a temporary one and that the number of arrivals would not steadily increase.

This initial assumption was quickly challenged as the war in Syria did not show signs of appeasement and more and more people were forced to leave the country. LFIP was the government's response to provide a comprehensive legal framework for asylum in Turkey. The law already set the ground to create a TP status for Syrians, which was enshrined in a directive in October 2014.

Turkey is a signatory of the Geneva Convention on refugees dating from 1951. The controversy, however, lies in the fact that it maintains a geographical limitation that excludes from protection anyone not originating from a European country.<sup>15</sup>

Until now, the Turkish government has been reluctant to lift the geographical limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Ankara has stated that it would only lift it after becoming a member of the EU. However, under TP, Syrians enjoy many of the same rights as those with refugee status with the only exceptions of being able to work without a work permit and being able to obtain citizenship after a stipulated time frame. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the TP framework is conceived as a temporary measure, it does not have a maximum time limit. By law however, the application of TP can be receded of a simple decision by the executive branch.

Syrians under TP are granted a legal stay in Turkey and are protected against nonrefoulement. With this status they can also enjoy free access to health, education, social aid, and translation services, as well as access to the labor market. In order to be able to enjoy these rights, Syrians need to obtain a Temporary Protection Identification Document issued by the PDMM which attests that the person concerned is a beneficiary of TP.

While most of the barriers to registration have been eased over the years, there are still unregistered Syrians living in Turkey. Some have been reluctant to register as they thought that it might lower their chances to move to Europe or eventually going back to Syria. Those unregistered refugees are therefore not able to access the services and benefits offered by the Turkish state. Something similar happens to those refugees who register in the province they first arrive in and decide to move to a different part of the country later on. Syrians can move outside their province of residence for no more than 90 days upon receiving authorization. However, if they decide to not return, they will have to register again in the new province, otherwise they would lose their rights. In many cases, they do not apply again and become unprotected and vulnerable. A situation which, at the same time, makes it more difficult to know who is living where and planning for the provision of services to the people in need.

On the other hand, due to the high concentration of refugees in urban centers, some provinces have reportedly suspended registration, with exceptions being made for newborn children and medical cases, as this is putting their public services under strain.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the refugee population is increasingly concentrated in a few cities has become a challenge that needs urgent attention at all levels.

<sup>15</sup> This is particularly significant when taking into account that one of the key implicit assumptions of the returns to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement is that Turkey can be considered a safe third country. However, according to EU law, a third country can only be considered safe if it has ratified the provisions of the Geneva Convention without any geographical limitations, as stipulated in the Directive 2013/32/EU of June 26, 2013, on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (article 39 2(a)).

<sup>16</sup> "Turkey stops registering Syrian asylum seekers", Human Rights Watch, July 16, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/16/turkey-stops-registering-syrian-asylum-seekers>.

**Access to health care:**

All Syrians under TP in Turkey are eligible to receive the same health care as Turkish citizens, being covered by the national health insurance scheme. Emergency medical services are also provided to nonregistered persons.

Syrians have the right to access free of charge health care services provided by public health institutions, for both primary and secondary care. As subsidy of 80 percent applies to medication costs, which used to be covered by AFAD but are covered by DGMM since March 2018.

Other than primary health care services and public hospitals, Syrians can also approach one of five-hundred seventy Migrant Health Centers, usually located in the provinces with high refugee population density. These centers are staffed by both Syrian doctors and nurses, as well as bilingual (Turkish-Arabic) Turkish medical staff. Through the Facility, the EU is financing the establishment, furniture and operating costs of many of these centers. As of May 2018, 1,515 medical staff (75 percent being Syrian refugees, 16 percent Turkish citizen Syrians) are delivering primary health care services in the one-hundred and sixty-nine Migrant health centers supported by the project.

Syrians under TP can also benefit from mental health services provided by public health care institutions. More than 124,000 refugees have received support and treatments in this area delivered through various partners. Several NGOs are also offering mental health and psychological support in different locations around Turkey. In 2017, the first Community Mental Health Centre was opened by the Ministry of Health, with funding coming from the Facility. Nine more centers are expected to open in the near future.

Nevertheless, two major obstacles remain when guaranteeing a full access to health care for Syrian refugees: the language barrier and the high mobility of refugee population. In most health care facilities interpreters are not available, rendering communication with health care providers very difficult. Some NGOs, including the Turkish Red Crescent, are trying to cover this gap. On the other hand, access to health care services is only possible

in the province where Syrians are registered. Therefore, they risk losing this right if they decide to move elsewhere. The only exception is when a person needing a specific treatment is referred to another province because it is not available in the province of registration.

**Access to labor market:**

Syrian refugees are entitled to apply for a work permit following a regulation passed in January 2016. In 2018, the number of work permits granted to Syrians under TP is around 25,000. This represents a very small fraction of the more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees between the age of 19 and 64 who are part of the labor force in Turkey. There are two main reasons for this low number. On the one hand, employers do not have enough incentives to hire Syrians in the formal labor market and prefer to hire them informally to evade taxes and social security payments. On the other hand, Syrians are wary of accepting formal contracts of employment as it would disentitle them from claiming state benefits. There is, in this regard, a general disincentive on both sides to settle formalities. To remedy this issue, the government is putting in place some measures such as reducing the work permit fee from 600 to 250 Turkish liras (US\$52) in order to promote refugee employment but more incentives are needed to mitigate this problem. Encouraging Syrian refugees to move to the formal economy is also important to reduce perceptions of unfair competition, in an economy where the unemployment rate among Turkish citizens is around 10%.

While in some cases Syrians are considered as competitors for jobs, they have also proved their entrepreneurial flair by starting economic activities that are improving their own livelihoods and that of others. According to the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), "Syrians have invested nearly \$334 million into 6,033 new formal companies since 2011 and they rank number one among foreign founders of new companies each year since 2013."<sup>17</sup> It is estimated that Syrian investments in Turkey are around 463,000 USD.

Another challenge that needs to be urgently addressed is the phenomenon of child labor, which

<sup>17</sup> Another side of the story. A market assessment of Syrian SMEs in Turkey, Syrian Economic Forum, June 2017, [http://buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm\\_reports/another\\_side\\_to\\_the\\_story\\_a\\_market\\_assessment\\_of\\_syrian\\_smes\\_in\\_turkey.pdf](http://buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm_reports/another_side_to_the_story_a_market_assessment_of_syrian_smes_in_turkey.pdf).



Syrians have started new businesses in Turkey ranging from restaurants and repairing shops to haberdashery and clothes shops. Credit: Umut Uras / Al Jazeera

does not only involve Syrians but also Turkish children, although on a different scale. In response to this, the government declared 2018 as the year of the fight against child labor in Turkey accompanied by a comprehensive National Action Plan to prevent this phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Another important issue relates to the situation of seasonal and agricultural workers. While work permit requirements can be exempted for such work, most refugees remain employed informally and represent a vulnerable subclass among Syrian refugees. While most attention recently has been given to urban refugees, Syrians working in the agricultural sector should not be overlooked.

Facilitating access to the labor market by removing existing barriers is crucial for the integration of Syrians into society and guaranteeing a sustainable livelihood for them and their families. Encouraging the process to start a business in Turkey, as well as

easing the investment environment can be a way of expanding employment opportunities for refugees.

**Access to education:**

Turkey's approach to the education of Syrian refugee children provides the best evidence yet that Ankara is serious about facilitating the long-term settlement of Syrians in Turkey. Education indeed remains one of the greatest challenges for refugee populations, with the risk of creating a "lost generation" with long-term negative effects. In Turkey, there are close to one million Syrian school age children.

Since the beginning of the crisis, a dual education system was put in place: on the one hand, Ankara opened access to Turkish public schools to all Syrians, who then follow the Turkish curriculum; on the other hand, since September 2014, Ankara

<sup>18</sup> Nikolaj Nielsen, "EU and Turkey fight for 'lost generation'", EU Observer, June 4, 2018, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/141971>.



A Syrian teacher in the classroom at a Temporary Education Center. Credit: Turkey PM Press & Info

started to establish (or recognized informally existing) Temporary Education Centers (TECs), which follow a modified Syrian curriculum taught in Arabic with a majority of Syrian teachers. Initially, the TECs were much more popular among Syrian students than Turkish public schools.

This system significantly increased the rate of enrollment: in 2014, roughly 30 percent of school age children were enrolled, while roughly 62 percent

were enrolled as of 2018 (including primary school enrollment rate close to 100 percent). Ensuring the enrollment of the remaining 38 percent is both a priority and a challenge for Turkish authorities. In 2016, roughly 41 percent of Syrian children were enrolled in TECs, while 59 percent were in Turkish public schools.

Responding to concerns regarding both the uneven quality of education in TECs and the isolation of school children from the rest of Turkish society, Ankara decided in early 2016 to phase out TECs. This transition to enroll all Syrian children in Turkish public schools would ensure the better integration of Syrians into Turkish society and would officially recognize Syrian students' diplomas in Turkey and beyond.

This transition is facilitated with funds from UNICEF and the European Commission with the goal to reach 100 percent enrollment of Syrian children. However, the fast pace of the transition and a lack of preparedness from public schools has led to concerns that the transition will increase resentment of both Syrian and Turkish children, teachers, and parents, possibly leading to a drop in the enrollment rate. In addition, questions are being asked regarding how the Turkish curriculum could be revised to better integrate the experience of Syrians, which reignite the broader questions of multiculturalism in the Turkish education system.

## FUTURE PROSPECTS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

As is usual in the early response to mass refugee influx, Turkish authorities' main focus so far has been to provide temporary relief to population facing urgent needs. As Turkish authorities are aware, the time to move beyond short-term solutions and think of durable ways to address long-term needs has long come. In practice however, the conceptualization and implementation of durable solutions proves challenging.

The international community has long talked about three durable solutions to refugee situations: resettlement into a third country, voluntary return, and integration in the host country. In the case of Syrians in Turkey, resettlement into a third country remains a difficult option given an unfavorable international environment in both Europe and the United States where governments are reluctant to resettle refugees. Nevertheless, resettlement was one of the most important aspects of the EU-Turkey refugee deal signed in March 2016. Since then, roughly 15,000 Syrians were resettled from Turkey to different EU member states.<sup>19</sup> It is unclear how many more will be resettled given the voluntary nature of the scheme hereafter, and in any case, these figures only represent a small fraction of the overall Syrian population in Turkey.

For a long time, return was not a viable option, but while it continues to be very challenging, the withdrawal of ISIS from the area, and the Turkish military incursions in Jarablus and Afrin, have been used as an argument to encourage the "return" of Syrians to Syria (even though the land offered to them may not be the area where they are from). Since 2017, AFAD has announced that 150,000 Syrians have permanently returned to Syria (in northern areas where there is a Turkish military presence).<sup>20</sup> However, given the complexity of the Syrian conflict, it is unclear how much protection Syrian returnees can really benefit from, and their

“By definition, temporary protection does not offer a durable solution, and the lack of long-term guarantee for Syrians put them in a limbo situation.”

immediate security remain dependent on the strength of the Turkish military in the area at the time.

Finally, integration seems to be the most likely option for a significant portion of the Syrian population. By definition, TP does not offer a durable solution, and the lack of long-term guarantee for Syrians put them in a limbo situation, which creates detrimental form of permanent precarity. The ongoing transition from the “Syrian” temporary education centers to Turkish public schools is a strong signal of Ankara's recognition and willingness to accommodate Syrians' long-term stay in Turkey. In addition, following an announcement in July 2016 by the president, there has been a move to open a path to Turkish citizenship to some Syrians. It is estimated that about 57,000 Syrians have gained Turkish citizenship, a quarter of whom claimed citizenship through filiation or marriage. The majority, however, gained citizenship as part of an effort to recognize the contribution of highly educated, highly skilled individuals, including sportspersons and artists. There does not seem to be a broader policy to provide access to citizenship to the large majority of Syrians.

In fact, Ankara refrains from talking about integration, and the official policy is still based on the assumption that Syrians will eventually leave Turkey. Rather,

<sup>19</sup> According to the one-to-one principle of the Turkey-EU statement, the EU should resettle in Europe one Syrian refugee for every irregular migrant returned to Turkey. While 1,700 migrants have been returned to Turkey, roughly 15,000 have been resettled, well exceeding the one-to-one principle. Nevertheless, many more refugees in Turkey should be offered resettlement as a durable solution.

<sup>20</sup> Zeynep Bilgehan, “Some 150,000 Syrians have returned from Turkey,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, May 1 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/some-150-000-syrians-have-returned-from-turkey-131108>.

Another source from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that the current number (in August 2018) of Syrian returnees to Syria is 194,514.

the official policy is one of “harmonization” (*uyum*) to facilitate the long-term (but still temporary) harmony between Syrians and Turkey’s population. A harmonization policy has been in the works for some time now.

The lack of clear durable prospects for Syrians is difficult not only for Syrians themselves, but also for the community in which they are a part of in Turkey. With rising numbers, the Turkish population, that has proved particularly welcoming and resilient so far, is showing clear signs of increasing frustration. Three main factors contribute to increased animosity: the political polarization over the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the lack of clear future prospects for Syrians, and the lack of awareness campaigns regarding Syrians refugees to dispel many of the commonly held incorrect beliefs, as well as help the Turkish population prepare to live with refugees in the long-term.

“Ankara refrains from talking about integration (and prefer the term “harmonization”) and the official policy is still based on the assumption that Syrians will eventually leave Turkey.”



A Syrian refugee looking over Urfa and contemplating his future. Credit: Ferdi Ferhat Özsoy, W.A.I.T (Why am I in Turkey?), <https://whyamiinturkey.com/>

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the past 7 years, and with over 3.5 million Syrian refugees on its territory, Turkey has been faced with an unprecedented migration challenge which no country could ever be prepared for enough. Yet, over the years, Turkey put in place a number of policies, coordinated among many different actors, and provided a multifaceted response to a complex question. All of Turkey’s approach toward Syrian refugees cannot be understood in one single story, and this report proposes to present insights into the complexity and sometimes contradictions of Turkey’s response to refugees. However, looking at the situation today, Turkey deserves acknowledgment for its resilience in managing the situation with calmness and openness.

“Turkey deserves acknowledgment for its resilience in managing the situation with calmness and openness. Unlike other countries, it has demonstrated both financial and organizational capacities, as well as political will.”

Refugees across the world today face a tough predicament. In many developing countries, there is a lack of financial and organizational capacities that would enable to respond swiftly to refugees’ needs. In many developed countries, there has been recently a lack of political willingness to be fully welcoming toward refugees. Turkey is not only unique for the record number of Syrian refugees it has hosted, but also for eschewing these two pitfalls: indeed

it has demonstrated that it has both the material capabilities and the political will to provide a dignified life to refugees. Accordingly, it is not uncommon to hear Syrian refugees saying that Turkey, of all other countries, is the best option for Syrian refugees. Some experts have also said that what Turkey has achieved in the last few years is unprecedented in the history of refugee movements. However, this unique and laudable approach should be an encouragement to do even more for Syrians (together with the international community) by paying attention to some of the shortcomings of existing policies. To fully become a model of how to welcome refugees, Ankara can remain proud of itself, while at the same time remain open to new ways of improving and addressing remaining difficulties. In particular, the Syrian refugee policy put in place in 2014-15 has been slowly dismantled over time (sidelining of camps, closing of the border, limitation on freedom of movement under TP, early returns, possible push backs, demographic engineering, etc.), and a new sense of direction needs to be put in place.

In light of this reality, Ankara could consider the following:

- **Develop a more deliberate and operational strategy** to address present and future needs of Syrians and the host community. While the principles of Turkey’s approach were always clearly affirmed at the discourse level, actors on the ground were not always given the means and clear direction on how to implement said principles. This needs also to be accompanied by an enhanced communication and coordination between the different actors involved at the national and local level in order to ensure a better response to refugees’ needs, as well as to mitigate tensions or problems arising from their coexistence with the host community. Internal and external oversight to ensure that the principles announced at the top are implemented accordingly should be encouraged, which includes systematic investigation of reports of human rights violations and irregularities.

- **Engage in institution-consolidation:** the transfer of responsibilities from AFAD to DGMM, and to a lesser

extent with the Turkish Crescent, has prevented the creation of expertise and effective process. Investing in the long run in a professional institution such as DGMM, with capacity-building and staff training and retention, will help DGMM fulfil its mandate.

**- Reassess the value of limiting Syrians' mobility:** while there is solid ground for wanting to manage the spread of Syrians on Turkish territories, the requirement of Syrians to live in their province of registration seems to lead to more Syrians becoming unregistered and losing access to essential services.

**- Strengthen the mandate and means of municipalities:** as the actor working closely with refugees in their daily struggle, municipalities have a great potential, but must be given the tools (legal and financial) to develop local solutions to local problems and act accordingly and consistently with the works of other municipalities. A good starting point would be to take into account the number of Syrian refugees in the total population numbers as regards to future budget allocations from the government. Integration is always contextual, and can best be facilitated in a decentralized manner at the local level.

**- Craft a harmonization strategy that is proactive and inclusive.** While the extent of the Syrian crisis could not be anticipated in 2011, the upcoming challenges of Syrians long-term stay in Turkey can. Proactively assisting Syrians' incorporation in Turkish society should be done by consulting with a wide range of actors, from international, national and local institutions, to civil society actors, communities' leaders, and Syrians themselves. Experiences of foreign countries with integration, assimilation and multi-cultural models should be assessed to better understand what is at stake. The integration of Syrian students in Turkish schools is a good step, but needs to be complemented with more training for teachers, and additions to the curriculum that will allow for a better acceptance of Syrian students.

**- Commit on a form of durable solution** for Syrians in Turkey. Even if the overall strategy involves a mix batch of durable solutions (including voluntary returns and resettlement), there is a need for a long-term prospect for Syrians in Turkey. While blanket naturalization and lifting the geographical limitation seem off the table (for complex reasons), other options include opening a path to long-term residency, or

granting the status of subsidiary protection (*ikincil koruma*). Among other things, these two options provide automatic rights to work (without applying for work permit), which would facilitate Syrians' healthy integration in the job market.

“The Syrian refugee policy put in place in 2014-15 has been slowly dismantled over time (side-lining of camps, closing of the border, limitation on freedom of movement under TP, early returns, possible push backs, demographic engineering, etc.), and a new sense of direction is now needed.”

**- Further facilitate Syrians' financial autonomy.** Further incentives need to be offered to employers in order to hire more Syrians through, for example, wage subsidies or cash for work programs and to entrepreneurs in order to establish their own companies. Easing investment procedures for foreigners in Turkey would help. Becoming economically independent through a job is a first step toward participating in society.

**- Focus efforts on mitigating rising tensions between Syrians and host community.** Putting in place programs that promote social inclusion and peaceful coexistence (sports tournaments, handcrafts, choir, etc.), prioritizing projects that improve living conditions of both refugees and host society without discrimination, and closely monitoring existing tensions can all help foster positive relations between refugees and host communities. Such policies can also be useful for other vulnerable foreigners living

in Turkey, such as non-Syrian asylum seekers and irregular migrants working in the informal sector.

**- Engage in public policy diplomacy at home.** There is a need to better explain what policies are in place toward Syrian refugees and why, to raise awareness both about the positive contribution of refugees to Turkey's society and economy, and about the collective challenge it represents, so as to make solidarity with refugees a societal project as much as a governmental one.

**In turn, the international community could:**

**- Increase funding.** Through the Facility for Refugees, the EU has been financially supporting refugees and the host communities in Turkey and the results it has delivered are very satisfactory so far. More should be done in order to communicate the concrete results of the cooperation between the EU and Turkey in this area. But there are also concerns regarding the sustainability of some programs once the EU funds run out. More broadly, the international financial support received by Turkey continues to represent a small percentage of the total spent by Turkey. Therefore the international

community should continue supporting Turkey, as well as the other countries bordering Syria, in order to give Syrians living in these countries hope for the future.

**- Streamline funding.** Many of the projects funded by international donors (EU, US, and others) are often financed through a UN agency, which, in turn, work with an implementing partner. Ensuring that more funds go directly to beneficiaries, and less on operational costs, should be a priority.

**- Increase resettlement.** On one hand, there has been a lack of burden-sharing among Member States of the European Union, but also from countries around the world regarding refugee resettlement. The EU-Turkey statement contains a clause which stipulates that a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme will be activated once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU have been substantially reduced, which is the case. However, as its name indicates, it is a voluntary admission plan, so Member States are not obligated to take in more refugees.

**- Support initiatives that will encourage Turkey to reach the goals highlighted above.**

## FACT SHEET



**3,542,250**

Syrians under TP in Turkey  
(DGMM, August 2018)



**360,608**

Non-Syrian asylum seekers  
(UNHCR, June 2018)

**1,621,430 (46%)**

Syrians under TP are female  
(DGMM, August 2018)

**1,661,602 (48%)**

Syrians under TP are children (under 18)  
(DGMM, August 2018)



**206,403 (6%)**

Syrians live in temporary accommodation centers  
(DGMM, August 2018)



**55,583**

Syrians who received Turkish citizenship  
(İnsan Haklarını İnceleme Komisyonu, March 2018)



**346,330**

Syrians born in Turkey  
(MFA, August 2018)



**976,200**

School-aged Syrians (5-18)  
(Ministry of National Education, 2018)

**603,929**

Syrians enrolled in School  
(Ministry of National Education, 2018)

**About 20,000**

Syrians enrolled at Turkish Universities  
(MFA, August 2018)



**About 25,000**

Syrians who received a work permit in 2018  
(Ministry of Labor, Social Services and Family)

**50,128**

Syrians with a work permit  
(MFA, August 2018)



**14,998**

Syrians resettled in the EU as part of the EU-Turkey Statement  
(DGMM, June 2018)

**2,224**

Irregular migrants returned to Turkey as part of the EU-Turkey Statement  
(European Commission, June 2018)



**194,514**

Syrians who returned to Syria  
(MFA, August 2018)

## ACRONYMS

- AFAD** Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency
- DGMM** Directorate General for Migration Management
- ECHO** European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
- ESSN** Emergency Social Safety Net
- EU** European Union
- FRIT** Facility for Refugees in Turkey
- GDP** Gross Domestic Product
- ILO** International Labor Organization
- IOM** International Organization for Migration
- ISIS** Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
- LFIP** Law on Foreigners and Temporary Protection
- NGO** Nongovernmental Organization
- IHH** Humanitarian Aid Foundation
- INGO** International Nongovernmental Organization
- PDMM** Provincial Department for Migration Management
- TEC** Temporary Education Center
- TOBB** Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey
- TP** Temporary Protection
- UNDP** United Nations Development Program
- UNHCR** United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees
- UNICEF** United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
- WFP** World Food Program
- WHO** World Health Organization

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Credit: Friends of Europe/Flickr

**Laura Batalla** has been working at the European Parliament since 2011 in different capacities. Currently, she serves as the secretary general of the European Parliament Turkey Forum, a platform for high-level discussion between European and Turkish officials, political decision makers, experts, and civil society and business actors. As an expert on Turkey and European affairs, she has published policy and research papers for renowned think tanks and academic journals, as well as opinion pieces in the media. Ms. Batalla is a 2018 Marshall Memorial Fellow and a member of the Turkey Europe Future Forum, a project of the Mercator Program Center for International Affairs (MPC) in cooperation with TÜSIAD. This report was written in her personal capacity and does not represent the view of the European Parliament



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The authors would like to thank all of the individuals (refugees, researchers, government officials, NGO representatives, EU and UN agencies representatives) met during three separate field trips in Istanbul, Ankara, and Gaziantep in summer 2018. An additional thanks to the Atlantic Council and the Turkish Heritage Organization for making these trips possible.



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