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URBAN REFUGEES:
THE EXPERIENCES OF SYRIANS IN ISTANBUL

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Conflict analysis	5
Urban refugees	8
Turkey's Refugee Laws	12
Syrian Urban Refugees	15
Istanbul Case Study	17
Lukewarm support for Syrians in Urban Areas	22
Conclusion	25
Bibliography	27

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In over six years of escalating violence, more than 200,000 Syrians have been killed, and millions more have been forced to flee their homes both within the country and to neighboring states. The repercussions of this ongoing violence have reached Europe, with refugee numbers set to reach 1 million in Germany alone.[1] In a desperate bid to stem the flow of people, the EU and Turkey reached a deal in November 2015 to reduce the number of migrants entering Europe from Turkish territory.

UNHCR's Regional Refugee Response estimates that Turkey now hosts 2.1 million registered Syrians refugees.[2] This number easily reaches 2.3 million when unregistered Syrians are included. Contrary to the popular image, the majority of Syrians, like other refugee groups, are found outside camps in urban areas. Through interviews with a sample of Turkish NGOs and Syrian people of different religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds in Istanbul, this report highlights the daily challenges and insecurity faced by Syrians in urban areas that are not only leading many to leave for Europe but also directly influencing refugees' choices in how they exit the country.

While the Turkish state has spent over 7.6 billion USD on refugees, the overwhelming majority of this goes towards the 25 refugee camps in the country. There is no state support for urban refugees in Turkey outside those near the camps. Inconsistency also exists in the position, knowledge, and response of the various municipal governments in Istanbul regarding Syrian populations. In consultation with the Istanbul governor's office and the relevant national agencies, Istanbul's local municipalities are responsible for and oversee a number of services in their vicinity from infrastructure and maintenance to health, religious, and water services. Knowledge of the number and needs of the populations in their districts is a necessity for municipal development in order to plan for emergencies, capacities, and services. In this context, the paradox posed by Syrians in urban areas is that they are a development and legislative challenge and not a humanitarian problem.

All interviewees for this report highlighted a number of problems and issues with living in Turkey. In the case of one family interviewed, these were identified as push factors that eventually led them to travel to Europe. A lack of documentation such as residence or work permits and the accompanying rights entailed exclude Syrians from simple practices such as opening a bank account, ensuring restitution for their work, legally renting, and in many cases paying their utilities. This creates a fundamental insecurity and instability in the lives of Syrians that prevents them from settling in Turkey.

Bureaucratic problems in harmonization and communication result in rules and laws being inadequately announced and inconsistently applied from place to place. These problems range from inconsistency in the application of mobility restrictions on Syrians to knowledge of their rights. Despite legal entitlements and efforts by the Turkish state to enroll Syrian children into schools, there has been limited success outside the camps. In urban areas, there have been reports of some schools rejecting Syrian children due to discrimination, a lack of capacity, or ignorance of the law.[3] Similarly, there is inconsistency in the application and acceptance of Syrians by health workers. Interviewees have also complained of the speed in which rules governing Syrians in Turkey change and of not being able to find information on this. This inconsistency and a lack of transparency in the implementation of laws and regulations governing Syrians make their situation insecure and untenable.

This paper has chosen to highlight the specific challenges of Syrian communities in Turkey though many of these same issues are faced by other refugee groups. The absence of legal recognition translates into multiple limitations in the lives of urban refugees. This creates the fundamental problem of temporality versus permanency that defines the insecure experiences of many Syrians in Turkey and leads them to risk their lives in the dangerous journey to Europe.

1 T. Porter, "Refugee crisis: Germany has received over 1 million migrants in 2015," *International Business Times*, December 10, 2015. Retrieved http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/refugee-crisis-germany-has-received-over-1-million-migrants-2015-1532674

2 Syrian Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, *United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees*, November 2015, accessed November 30, 2015, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.

3 "When I Picture My Future, I See Nothing': Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey," *Human Rights Watch*, November 8, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/08/turkey-400000-syrian-children-not-school.
"Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey," *ORSAM*, Report No. 195, January 2015, accessed July 15, 2015, http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/anasayfa.aspx.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

The Syria crisis is nearing its sixth year with no prospect of a solution to the violence or a clean victory for one side. More than 200,000 Syrians have been killed and millions forced to flee their homes as both the social fabric and the physical infrastructure of the country have been destroyed. According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), half of the country's 22 million population have been directly affected by the conflict, with an estimated 7.6 million people internally displaced[4] and another 4 million registered as refugees across the region in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.[5]

The dynamics of the Syrian conflict have a particular effect on its citizens and the region. The Syrian crisis has degenerated from grassroots protests in local neighborhoods to provincial uprisings, civil conflict, and now regional proxy wars with little engagement, consultation, or consideration for the Syrian people. Human rights violations are increasing daily with evidence of atrocities conducted against civilians by the regime, militias, and jihadist groups. This follows decades of repression and state-sponsored violence in Syria that further compound the violations and crimes.

Until the 1970s with the rise of Hafez al-Assad, Syria had a long history of military interference and political instability stretching back to the colonial period and the French Mandate. With the country's independence in 1946, new political alignments, parties, and ideologies jostled for dominance in the Syrian Arab Republic. Among these, two antithetical parties would emerge: the Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Found in 1947 in Syria by Michel Aflaq, the Ba'ath Party wove together nationalism, socialism, and pan-Arab aspirations.

This fledgling political pluralism ended permanently with Syria's political unification with Egypt in 1958. The establishment of the United Arab Republic under General Nasser was popular among Syrians, as it ended the pattern of fluctuating military and political rule and achieved the long held pre-colonial aspiration of Arab unification. The unification, however, did not last long. Growing dissatisfaction with Nasser's authoritarianism, and inspired by the Iraqi Ba'ath Party's seizure of power in February 1968, encouraged elements of the Syrian military to once again intervene in politics. On March 8, 1963, an elite group of officers including Hafez al-Assad known as the Military Committee seized power and established the Syrian Arab Republic.[6]

What followed was nearly a decade of coups and internal power struggles both within the armed forces and the Military Committee itself. Attempts to reignite political plurality that had once existed, particularly by the Muslim Brotherhood, were stamped out. Driven underground, the group became Assad's greatest nemesis after he ascended to power in 1970. Escalating attacks throughout the end of the seventies by a militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood resulted in thousands being detained, massacres of real and suspected members of the group, and civilians caught in the middle. It was during this time that the regime's current counter-insurgency approach of Total War was formed.

The situation reached a climax in 1982 in Hama when 200 fighters from the Muslim Brotherhood military wing tried to seize control of the city and killed 20 soldiers in an attempt to instigate an armed uprising against Assad. Over a three-week period, the government sealed the city and laid siege to it with bombs and artillery before sending in ground forces to go door-to-door. The regime did not differentiate between fighters and civilians. By the end of the three weeks, Hama had been destroyed and between 20,000-40,000 people killed, including the 200 militants. The legacy of Hama hangs over Syria and its current violent dynamics.

4 "2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile - Syrian Arab Republic: Overview," *United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees*, 2015, accessed November 30, 2015, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html.

5 Syrian Regional Refugee Response,

6 Suhaib Abu Doulah, *Syria: The Reckoning Parts 1 and 2, Al Jazeera World*, 2013, accessed June 10, 2015, www.aljazeera.com.

The indiscriminate destruction of the city and its denizens may have ended national opposition to the Assad regime at the time; however, it also symbolized the brutality and fundamental repression of the Syrian people. Furthermore, it snuffed out all alternative leadership to Assad, creating a vacuum that plagues the country and its conflict to this day.

The 2011 protests had been a long time in the making after decades of autocratic rule punctuated by massacres and frequent human rights violations. For more than 40 years, the Assad family has governed Syria with the support of the armed forces. Hafez al-Assad ruled the country for 30 years in an autocratic system in which any dissent was brutally suppressed. The regime even prevented the emergence of alternative leadership from its own Alawite sect, effectively linking the community's security and insecurity to the fate of the Assad regime.[7] Nepotism and corruption ran rampant. In 2000, after the death of his father, Bashar al-Assad took power. For one year, areas of the country flourished with political activities and discussion under the "Damascus Spring."[8] However, these reform processes were soon crushed and activists imprisoned under the guise of national unity and stability with the same fundamental repression, inequality, and corruption remaining at the heart of the regime.

Similar to the other Arab Spring countries, the uprisings in Syria were a pluralistic and grassroots movement with no leadership, ideology, or organizational base. It was a collection of localized voices articulating basic demands and a common goal: the end of the regime. But there was never any agreement on what should replace it - a problem that continues to this day. The localized nature of the initial protests and the absence of any organized opposition with a constituency inside the country prevented the emergence of an effective national movement that could have posed a serious challenge to the regime, especially in the context of growing violence.[9]

In tactics eerily similar to those employed in previous crackdowns, the regime responded to these peaceful protests by detaining, kidnapping, or killing civil activists in rural and urban areas, shooting protesters in the streets, and eventually indiscriminate aerial bombardment. The targeting of civilians discouraged people by raising the cost of peaceful civil disobedience while also encouraging some military conscripts to defect in the face of violent civil oppression. Given that the majority of the regime's soldiers are conscripts of Sunni origin and therefore questionable loyalties, the regime has continued to rely on a long-distance strategy of aerial bombardment with on-the-ground support provided by its elite units such as the Republican Guard, whose main function is to protect the government from both foreign and domestic threats. This is a strategy still in use by the regime. At the same time, near the end of 2011, the regime deliberately released a number of Islamist militants from Saidnaya prison in Damascus.[10] In the context of increasing oppression and human rights violations, the Islamists' narrative of violent resistance gained credence. The growing militancy of opposition groups has been used by the regime to justify its brutal tactics on the grounds that it was fighting Islamic extremists, though ones that they had created and encouraged.

Additionally, the government, opposition, and more recently jihadist groups have been playing on existing sectarian divides as a conflict strategy. Religious leaders on all sides have supported this strategy by inciting sectarian violence. While the Free Syrian Army (FSA) formed the main military opposition to the regime in 2011 as a conglomeration of different groups, it was viewed as corrupt and ineffective by local people. The FSA has been pillaged by the rise in Islamic extremist groups since 2013 with its fighters either killed by or recruited to the jihadist cause. The rise of jihadist groups has helped the Assad regime retain the reluctant loyalty of a number of minority groups such as Druze, Christian, and Alawite. The establishment of locally created and led militias in every Alawite, Christian, and Druze community has reinforced these sectarian divisions in the country. The regime's acquiescence to long-held Kurdish ambitions for autonomy in the North after decades of repression is also part of the government's sectarian agenda in fracturing potential supporter bases and creating buffers against any opponents, both rebels and jihadists.

7 *Syria's Metastasising Conflicts,* Middle East Report N°143, *International Crisis Group*, June 2013, accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/syria-lebanon/syria/143-syrias-metastasising-conflicts.aspx.

8 *The Damascus Spring,* Syria in Crisis, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed December 1, 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=48516.

9 *Anything But Politics: The State of Syria's Political Opposition*, Middle East Report N°146, *International Crisis Group*, October 2013, accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/syria-lebanon/syria/146-anything-but-politics-the-state-of-syria-s-political-opposition.aspx.

10 P. Sands, V. Justin, and S.Maayeh, "Assad Regime Set Free Extremists from Prison to Fire up Trouble during Peaceful Uprising," *The National*. January 21, 2014, accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.thenational.ae/world/syria/assad-regime-set-free-extremists-from-prison-to-fire-up-trouble-during-peaceful-uprising.

Civilians have also accounted for the majority of the casualties of jihadist groups. Despite their rhetoric, jihadist groups Daesh (the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levent) and Jabhat al-Nusrah have little motivation in directly engaging and trying to overthrow the Assad regime. They are far more interested in destroying rival groups, expanding their control over territory in the east and north of the country, and creating local governance structures in their territories. Civilians in areas under rebel control have suffered due to a number of factors. Many civilians, including minorities and Kurdish communities, flee the impending approach of jihadist groups, particularly Daesh. For those who stay, they face oppression related to the new governance systems imposed, especially for women. Civilians in jihadist-held areas in particular consistently suffer from aerial bombardment and attack from the regime, its supporters, and international opponents of the groups.

The skies of Syria are filled with competing kaleidoscopic aerial campaigns. Both Iran and Russia, for alternating reasons of self-preservation and regional hegemony, have openly supported Assad in providing financial and material resources and in attacking opposition and jihadist areas. Similarly, a Sunni coalition of states, particularly Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, oppose the Assad regime and have lent their support to "opposition" parties, including Islamist networks such as the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile, a mangle of Western states such as the UK, the United States, and France and Sunni countries such as Turkey and Jordan are bombing Daesh positions located in the center of civilian areas.

Among the tangle of competing actors, agendas, and goals, the people of Syria are being driven from their homes. The escalating and protracted nature of this conflict has had unprecedented social and economic impacts on Syria, as well as host countries throughout the region. After nearly six years of upheaval, more and more Syrians are being driven from their country by the continuingly escalating violence and their own despair over a solution. The denizens of Syria have also exhausted their savings and resources, meaning they are increasingly vulnerable, with millions in need of lifesaving humanitarian assistance and international protection. The desperation of migrating populations has affected refugee hosting states; overstretched basic social services such as health, water, sanitation, and education; aggravated unemployment; diminished trade and investment; and created competition for limited and declining resources.[11] The scope and severity of these cross-cutting issues has innumerable and long-lasting implications.

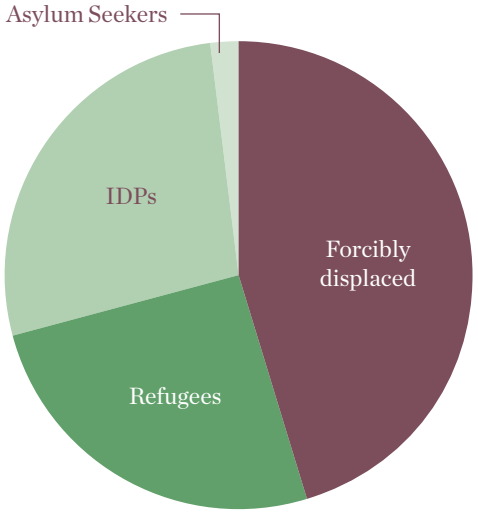
11 *Syrian Regional Refugee Response.*

URBAN REFUGEES

At the start of 2015, nearly 59.5 million individuals were registered as forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of conflict, persecution, and human rights violations. This was an increase of 8.3 million persons from the previous year, making it the single largest annual surge of forcibly displaced persons in recorded history. Of this, 38.2 million were internally displaced, 1.8 million were asylum seekers, and 19.5 million were refugees.

The UNHCR defines a refugee as someone who is "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."[12]

Figure 1 Global Forced Displacement End of 2014



When confronted with leaving their country, the area in which refugees choose to settle is dictated by a number of issues, including accessibility, security, familiarity, rural/urban affiliation, and financial mobility. Refugee camps are emergency responses usually as a result of a sudden influx of people and tend to accommodate the most vulnerable in society. Many of those in camps are fleeing on land from immediate threats to their lives and have little time to prepare for their journey. Those who stay in camps tend to be poor and from rural areas or towns close to the border.

In contrast, those refugees who go to cities tend to reflect a broader representation of the sending country. Financially secure people from the middle and business classes in urban environments are often the first refugees to settle in cities and towns of their host country. These people do not necessarily flee in large groups from an immediate threat of violence. Instead, they may be an individual or family escaping the general dangers and conditions of war that detach citizens from the state.[13] They have more time to strategically choose and prepare where to go, crossing borders by plane or bus, for example. As such, it is natural that they would choose to settle in an urban environment, where their knowledge and skills may be more applicable. These are people who may be more resourceful as they are seeking ways for self-sustainability rather than people in camps or rural areas who may need to be at sites for humanitarian aid.

As time progresses, refugees in camps may often seek more opportunities to address their sustained presence in a country. Camps are a reflection of the temporary emergencies in which they were created, which contradicts the protracted nature of conflicts. Refugees in camps are usually confronted by an environment of dependency and protracted stasis. From this perspective, refugees move to cities in their quest for jobs which is paramount to establishing a future. Urban areas can also represent independence, with greater opportunities despite significant vulnerabilities. This includes working in the informal and formal sector to support their sustained presence in the country.[14]

Contrary to the archetype, refugees continue to settle in urban areas rather than camps. This pattern has been the rule rather than the exception with camp-based settlements emerging only after the Cold War.[15] According to a 2014 UNHCR report, six out of 10 refugees globally live in urban areas. Comparatively, in 2009 only half of the world's refugee populations lived in urban areas.[16] Despite this, there is very little data

12 UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, July 28, 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189: 137.

13 G. Agamben, "We Refugees," *Symposium*, vol. 49: 114-119.

14 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*, September 2009, accessed November 25, 2015, http://www.unhcr.org/4ab356ab6.pdf.

15 J. Crisp, T. Morris, and H. Refstie, "Displacement in Urban Areas: New Challenges, New Partnerships," *Disasters,* vol. 36, no. 1 (2012): 23-42.

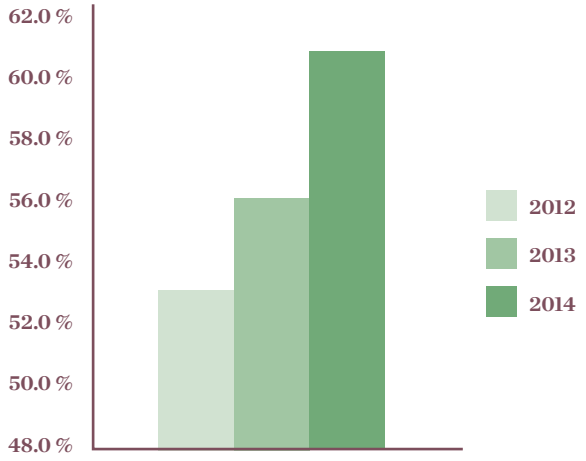
16 UNHCR, *Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*.

both in the literature and in policy papers on refugees in urban areas, with the overall focus continuing to emphasize camps and the challenges faced by refugees in these camps.

"Urban refugee" is a generic term that can encompass these different refugee groups and often focuses on the role of their displacement on the infrastructure and growth of cities and towns.[17] Some of these people may even reject identifying themselves as refugees given that they are not in camps. Yet, they are united in their common goal of seeking greater security in the opportunities and anonymity provided by cities and towns.

With the exception of wealthier individuals, however, by and large refugees join the ranks of the urban poor when they move to cities. Refugees are confronted with exclusion and exploitation and, in many instances, destitution even in "developed" countries such as Australia[18] and France.[19] Without documentation or legal protection, they are often left on the margins of society, treading a fine line between legal and illegal. This has an impact on the everyday small acts of people's lives such as paying a bill to larger issues of mobility and security.

Figure 2 Percentages of Global Refugees in Urban Areas



17 L.B., Landau, "Urban Refugees and IDPs," *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Kathy Long and Nado Sigona (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 139-151.

18 Hotham Mission, *Welfare Issues and Immigration Outcomes for Asylum Seekers on Bridging Visa E* (Melbourne: Hotham Mission, 2003).

19 J. Freedman, "Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate," 2nd edition (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

Fundamentally, a lack of documentation or legal protection affects all refugees and prevents them from establishing businesses or even ensuring restitution for their work. At the state level, it excludes a whole social group from paying taxes or amenities, such as electricity. At a personal level, it can make inconsequential practices more difficult or impossible, such as opening a bank account or paying a bill. With the option of legal work closed due to a lack of documentation, even highly skilled and educated urban refugees must work in the black market or illegally through cash payments. Given their legally dubious positions, many urban refugees are paid less than citizens of the country, leading to deprecation in wages and increasing unemployment among unskilled locals. Frequently, urban refugees are obliged to live in poor housing conditions that are overcrowded and overpriced, paying in cash without contracts that could protect them from being suddenly evicted.

The absence of documentation is also used as an excuse for excluding urban refugees from other services such as health care and education. This has much to do with language issues as well as poorly-implemented policies and capacity challenges. The influx of refugees to urban areas places pressure on local services such as health, education, and policing. These capacity challenges, in addition to changes in employment demographics and housing prices, can create antagonism between settled communities and urban refugees that can result in racist practices such as forced evictions, harassment, and criminality.

In general, for a number of reasons, refugee women and girls are disproportionally affected by conflict prior to and after migration. Refugee women are more vulnerable in their role as caregivers, impeding their mobility if they have to suddenly flee. As communal ties break down, women are disproportionally targeted for sexual and gender-based violence as their bodies become sites of ideological and physical warfare. This is further problematized by a lack of access to essential services such as health care for sexual assault, rape, and reproductive support in conflict-affected countries and inadequate access in host countries.

Despite growing international attention to the risks of sexual and gender-based violence faced by refugee women in camps, there has been far less engagement on the issue in an urban context. Instances of transactional or survival sex have a higher prevalence among women in urban areas. As a result of poverty, women and girls sometimes choose, or are forced, to engage in transactional sex to support themselves and their fami-

lies. In this way, women become the main earners to support their families. This is a global phenomenon for refugee women and has been documented in a number of diverse areas from the Congo[20] to Iraqi refugees in Syria.[21] Recent reports have highlighted that half of all Syrian refugee households in urban areas in Jordan are headed by women, who face harassment and offers for transactional sex and marriage.[22]

Responsibility as caregivers also reduces the ability of refugee women with families to avail of opportunities for amenities and improve their language skills. This makes it difficult for them to enter the labor market and further compounds the isolation of urban women and their dependency on their families.[23] A lack of education, literacy, or lower status in their culture can also combine to make refugee women more vulnerable for exploitation by strangers and their own family, who may sometimes see them as a burden. This has led to marriages of convenience or forced marriage.

Despite these challenges, it is sometimes easier for refugee women to find work in both the formal and informal labor market than men. For women, employment is often in the garment and textile industry or in the form of domestic work or cleaning.[24] These jobs are usually labeled as semi-skilled or unskilled, meaning that women are paid less than their male counterparts even in the informal labor market. [25] Due to a lack of legal protection measures, however, women are also more open to financial exploitation by employers and sexual or physical abuse. Again, language challenges and issues around gender and power mean that women may be perceived as more docile. The safety of women can also simply be compromised by the challenge of getting to and from work in poorly lit or dangerous areas. Not only do women face such external threats, but they also may suffer from domestic violence as traditional support structures break down. A change in family dynamics, for example, with women becoming the main wage earners can be destabilizing for men and lead to domestic abuse, particularly in patriarchal cultures.[26]

While refugees often face similar challenges to those of the urban poor and migrants, they are further disadvantaged by the inherent trauma and challenge of displacement from conflict that affect a person's sense of identity and power. There is the internal displacement from the homes they flee, their families, their communities, and eventually even their countries. Additionally, there are deeper challenges created by ruptured lives. There is the loss of life trajectory: loss of status, security and alienation due to separation from support networks, [27] restrictions on the right to work, access to services, language challenges, and antagonism from host communities.[28]

Displacement from conflict and violence further weakens collective and social support networks from families to communities. It challenges their social meaning and how they make sense of catastrophes, whether that is political, religious, or supernatural causes. This can lead to violence within different refugee communities and with host communities. It can also result in violations within communities such as domestic violence and substance abuse.

Research illustrates that these indirect consequences of war, such as changes in family dynamics and economic and social pressure, have a stronger impact on psychological wellbeing than direct violence.[29] For example, a study on Iraqi asylum seekers in London found that social and economic issues such as a lack of support structures was more closely related to psychological problems than a history of torture.[30] The emotional stability of children, for example, is resilient but is somewhat dependent on the coping abilities of their parents or guardian. Physical illness and disability as a result of conflict have also been illustrated to be significant triggers for psychological problems. Psychological issues related to conflict will more often emerge in

20 B. Maclin, J. Kelly, J. Kabanga, and M. VanRooyen, "'They have embraced a different behaviour': transactional sex and family dynamics in eastern Congo's conflict," *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* 17 no. 1 (2015): 119-131. DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2014.951395.

21 K. Zoepf, "Iraqi women survive in Damascus by prostituting themselves," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2007, accessed November 18, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/28/world/africa/28iht-syria.4.5900916.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

22 S. Sami, H. Williams, S. Krause, M. Onyango, A. Burton, and B. Tomczyk, "Responding to the Syrian Crisis: The Needs of Women and Girls," *The Lancet* 383 (2013): 1179–1181.7

23 Freedman, "Gendering," 32.

24 Ibid.

25 O. Özay, "Implications of Trade Policy Changes on Gender Inequalities," *Fe Dergi* 2 (2011): 33-53, accessed November 25, 2015, http://cins.ankara.edu.tr/6_4.html.

26 Menjivar, C., and O. Salcido, "Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence: Common Experiences in Different Countries," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, no. 6 (2002): 898-920

27 D. Summerfield, "Conflict and Health: War and Mental Health: A Brief Overview," *BMJ* 321 (2000): 232-235, doi:10.1136/bmj.321.7255.232.

28 Crisps et. al, "Displacement in Urban Areas," 524.

29 Summerfield, "Conflict and Health."

30 C. Gorst-Unsworth and E. Goldenberg, "Psychological Sequelae of Torture and Organised Violence Suffered by Refugees from Iraq: Trauma-Related Factors Compared to Social Factors in Exile," *Br J Psychiatry* 172 (1998): 90-94.

isolated and stressful alien environments, such as that faced by urban refugees.

Compared with their peers and co-nationals in rural and camp environments, urban refugees face more distinct challenges and risks with regard to shelter, work, social services, and psychological health. This is in part due to the lack of support and programs for urban refugees, with the stereotypical image of camps dominating responses and policies. By their very nature most urban refugees are more invisible than those in camps. Their relative anonymity provides them a layer of security, especially for minorities. Identifying the needs of such people is therefore difficult not only because of the invisibility factor but also due to the bureaucratic hurdle of coordinating between different municipalities, local actors, and international NGOs.

TURKEY'S REFUGEE LAWS

Due to its geographic position, Turkey has traditionally been a transit country for refugees, who were primarily from Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These refugees, who usually travelled as individuals rather than families, were registered by the UNHCR, provided with a small stipend, and placed in smaller satellite towns outside cities such as Yalova near Istanbul. Those who remained in the cities were usually single men seeking employment as they awaited their asylum cases to be processed.[31] Increasingly, however, Turkey is now the target country of migration and refugee flows. Instability in Afghanistan as a result of NATO withdrawals, ethnic cleansing, and violence across the Levant in Iraq and Syria has led to an increase in refugees from these areas in the past three years. UNHCR's Regional Refugee Response estimates that Turkey now hosts 2.1 million registered Syrians refugees.[32] This number is easily 2.3 million when unregistered Syrians are included.

Turkey's migration and asylum regime has struggled to come to terms with this new reality. Security through exclusion and ethnic privilege has been the main issue guiding Turkey's migration and asylum regime. This is prevalent throughout the four laws that have formed the basis of Turkey's system: the 1934 Law of Settlement, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, the 1994 Asylum Regulation, and the 2014 Law on Foreigners and International Protection.

The 1934 Settlement Law, of which the most recent revision was in 2006, provided immigrants of Turkish descent and culture privileged access in acquiring legal papers and eventually citizenship.[33] Muslims from the Balkans, Circassians, and Tartars were accepted for their ethnic and religious affiliation into Turkey over others such as Christian Orthodox and Shias.[34] The law is a legacy of the post-World War I era in which the Turkish Republic emerged from the sectarian ruins of the Ottoman Empire.

Ambiguity and exclusion around Turkey's asylum practices originates from this legislation. Turkey is a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1968 Protocol, however, it reserved the rights to establish a geographical limitation on refugees. As it stands, only refugees defined under the 1951 Convention, i.e. those who are fleeing their homes in Europe, are able to apply for asylum in Turkey. Asylum-seekers from non-European countries are expected to be resettled in a third state or returned to their country of origin. Yet, non-European people such as Bulgarian Turks in 1989, Ahiska Turks from Russia in 2009, and Afghans of Turkic origin have been granted asylum and citizenship. Under the 1934 Law and its 2006 amendment, it is not relevant whether such people should be legally categorized as refugees or migrants since they are given refuge based on their ethnic affiliation and not their legal status. Despite attempts to neutralize this ethnic preference with the 2009 Citizenship Law,[35] this privileged regime has remained in place in practice.

This trend of ambiguity and exclusion continued with the 1994 Asylum Regulation,[36] which remains the basis of current Turkish asylum procedures. The law, written in response to large influxes of refugees, imposed limitations on asylum seekers. It also instituted a dual application process. Status determination, previously the sole arena of the UNHCR, was put under the scope of the Turkish Ministry of Interior. Only those recognized as asylum seekers by the Ministry of Interior beforehand could then be referred for processing by the UNHCR. In order even to be eligible for consideration by the Ministry, asylum seekers had to register with the local police within five days in the province of their arrival and produce valid documentation, and

31 Interview in discussion with the author, Taksim, Istanbul, December 13, 2012.

32 *Syrian Regional Refugee Response.*

33 A. Parla, "Labor Migration, Ethnic Kinship, and the Conundrum of Citizenship in Turkey," *Citizenship Studies 15, no. 3-4 (2011): 457-470, doi: 10.1080/13621025.2011.564809.*

34 Z. Kadirbeyoğlu, "Changing Conceptions of Citizenship in Turkey," in *Citizenship Policies in the New Europe*, ed. R. Bauböck, B. Perchinig and W. Sievers (Expanded and Updated Edition) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

35 Parla, "Labor Migration."

36 The full name of the regulation is "Regulation of the procedures and the principles related to mass influx and foreigners arriving in Turkey either as individuals or in groups wishing to seek asylum from a third country."

potentially a visa, within 15 days.[37] This clause overlooks the realities faced by many asylum seekers and their ability to carry valid documentation and access visa procedures when fleeing a conflict.

The 2014 Law on Foreigners and International Protections (Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu) attempted to address some of the inconsistencies and exclusions prevalent in these previous laws. It established a new agency, the General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM) under the Ministry of Interior, with broad powers to manage and regulate nearly all areas related to migration, temporary protection, and refugees. Though, a Temporary Protection Regulation issued by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Turkey in October 2014 upholds the primacy of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) regarding issues related to camp-based refugees.

In addition to addressing major gaps in the immigration system, the Law on Foreigners was the first Turkish law to address the asylum status of people who would be staying in the country. While it did not annul the dual application process first established in 1994 or extend asylum to non-European refugees, it did expand protections. There are now three categories of people that are applicable under Turkey's asylum regime. These are refugees (legally identified as coming from Europe), conditional refugees (who stay in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled in a third country), and people granted subsidiary protection. Those under subsidiary protection in theory enjoy access to primary education and health care. [38] This last group is for foreigners or stateless people who do not qualify under the previous two conditions but nonetheless face threats to their lives in their country of origin. It is this category that is applied to the majority of Syrian refugees and replaces the empty policy term "guests."[39] Those not coming from Syria are excluded from this category, including Palestinian Syrians who have previously been denied entry.[40] This practice was reinforced by the announcement that from January 8, 2016 visas would be required for Syrians coming from third countries by land and sea.[41]

The 2014 law simply conforms to the basic temporary protection afforded to refugees under international law. This includes protection against forcible repatriation or expulsion, and the need to ensure their basic human rights, dignity, and safety. In contrast to other countries who offer temporary protection to refugees, there is no time restriction under the 2014 law. This means that Syrian refugees are in a perpetual legal limbo: legally guaranteed some basic humanitarian services but not any of the protections, rights, or mobility enjoyed by foreigners who have residence permits and certainly not of citizens.

Although the Law on Foreigners attempts to better delineate the definitions of those eligible for asylum in Turkey and their rights to services and protections, there is still much ambiguity and exclusion. Until the passing of the Foreigners Law in April 2014, Syrians with passports were able to obtain residence permits with a small administrative fee of 50 TL.[42] Residence permits were valid for one year anywhere in the country, with the exception of the Hatay and Sırnak provinces. Since the change in regulations, in practice Syrians are largely excluded from accessing residence permits. They must have a bank account, a rent contract, and 6,000 USD in a Turkish bank.[43] These, as well as many other, resources are inaccessible to most Syrians. Since the majority of Syrians do not hold a residence permit, when they try to legally leave Turkey they are treated like any other foreigner who has overstayed their visa and steeply fined. A change in the regulations in Syria, with passports of only two-year validity being issued,[44] has further compounded the expensive and bureaucratic challenges faced by Syrians.

Syrian refugees are generally categorized under subsidiary protection, but this has not yet been extended to other refugee demographics, such as Iraqi minorities. Iraqi refugees, who have a longer history of refugee flows to Turkey, would generally have been destined for

37 C. Mannaert, "Irregular migration and asylum in Turkey," *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*, 2003, accessed November 30, 2015, www.unhcr.org.

38 Law on Foreigners and International Protections, 2014. Part Three, Section One, Article 63, accessed December 3, 2015.

39 R. Kilberg, "Turkey's Evolving Migration Identity," *Migration Policy Institute*, July 24, 2014, accessed November 30, 2015 www.migrationpolicy.org.

40 Senay Özden, "The Syrian Crisis and its Regional Repercussions," (Conference, Işık University, Maslak. December 10, 2015).

41 S. Erkuş, "Turkey changes Syria visa policy to curb illegal entries," *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 30, 2015, accessed December 30, 2015, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-changes-syria-visa-policy-to-curb-illegal-entries.aspx?pageID=238&nID=93243&NewsCatID=352.

42 UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey Frequently Asked Questions*, October 2013, accessed November 18, 2015, http://www.unhcr.org.tr/uploads/root/faqenglish.pdf.

43 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015c.

44 Interviews in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015; Interview, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015.

resettlement in third countries and thus categorized as conditional refugees. However, given that the status of conditional refugees is based on the willingness of third countries to take them, more groups may be identified under this category than is publically acknowledged. The 2014 Temporary Protection Regulation issued by the Council of Ministers upheld the exclusion of all other refugee demographics from these protections.[45]

Fundamentally, there are a number of underlying issues and dynamics that continue to pervade the Turkish legal system for refugees. Turkey's asylum laws remain focused on resettlement or repatriation. Further, they are still treating the presence of 2.1 million Syrian refugees as a temporary situation rather than a longer development and legal problem. Prior to 2011, the length of time between asylum applications and resettlement by UNHCR was at least five years. This has since more than doubled. While the 2014 law tentatively suggests access to the work force in limited instances, this has not been achieved in practice. It also stops short of key issues such as legally supporting people's right to work and to housing that would support the security of refugees "temporarily" staying in Turkey.

45 UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey Frequently Asked Questions*, January 2015, accessed November 18, 2015, https://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/assets/hilfe/syrien/faq-syrians-in-turkey-english.pdf.

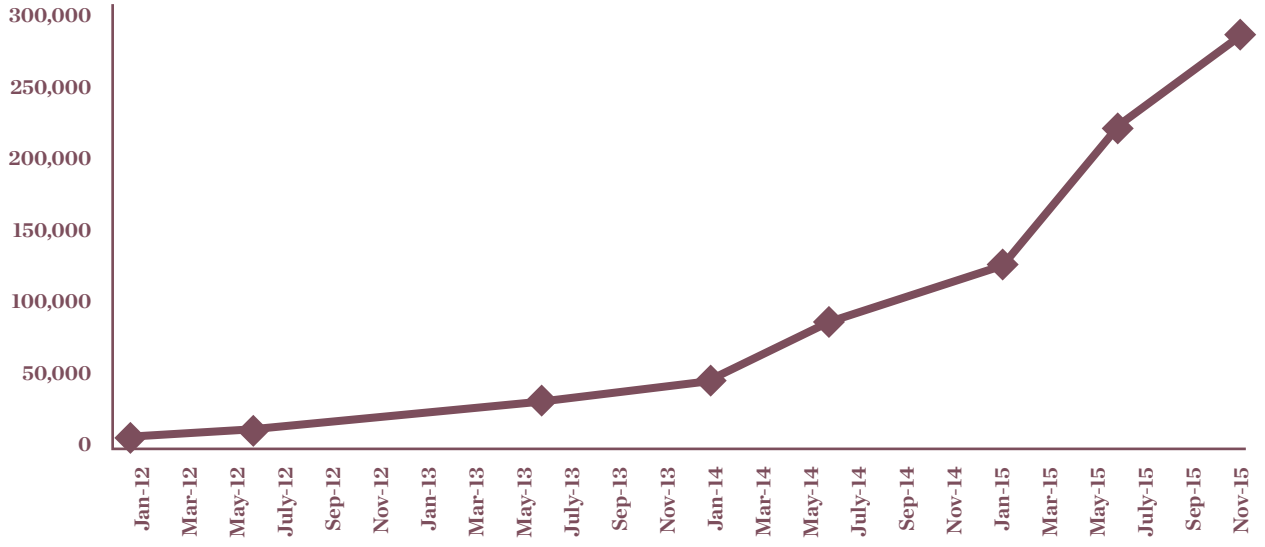
SYRIAN URBAN REFUGEES

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, Syrians have traditionally gravitated to urban areas rather than camps. A report by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD) reported that in 2012 only 36% of Syrian refugees in Turkey lived in camps.[46] The rest lived in various cities including those areas near the camps. By the end of 2014, 85 percent of the then 1.5 million Syrian refugees lived in individual accommodations in urban areas.[47] The Turkish state alone has spent over 7.6 billion USD on refugees.[48] The overwhelming majority of this goes towards the 25 refugee camps in the ten provinces in the southeast of the country.

Many of Turkey's refugee camps rank among the best in the world. The camps are well-managed and resourced, with many having paved roads, schools, and shops. Local leadership and councils among the residents are encouraged and supported by camp administrators to lobby and co-administer the camps. Refugees that are not staying in camps, however, face more difficult challenges related to accessing housing, food, education, health services, and employment. There is no state support for urban refugees in Turkey.

Research has found that initial Syrian settlers in urban areas in the region, such as in Gaziantep, did so due to family and business relations established in the area prior to the war.[49] As the conflict has continued to degenerate, more and more people are settling in non-camp areas, initially in towns bordering the camps, but also increasingly in larger metropolitan cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Konya, and coastal areas such as Izmir. While comparatively better off than their peers in neighboring countries, the protracted nature of the conflict and the challenges that refugees face in Turkey, particularly in urban areas, are some of the main drivers of migration to Europe. Most of the refugees traveling to Europe come from outside the camps.[50]

Figure 3 Asylum Applications for the EU, Norway, and Switzerland[51]



46 Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD). "Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2013," accessed December 17, 2015, https://www.afad.gov.tr/Dokuman/TR/61-2013123015505-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-2013_print_12.11.2013_eng.pdf.

47 "Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2014", *UNHCR*, 2015, p. 42-43, accessed November 20, 2015, http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html.

48 "Turkey spent $7.6 billion hosting 2.2 million Syrian refugees," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 18, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-spent-76-billion-hosting-22-million-syrian-refugees.aspx?pageID=238&nID=88680&NewsCatID=338.

49 N. Tuzcu, "Syrian Urban Refugees in Turkey: Spatial & Social Segregation," *Displacement Research and Action Network*, November 3, 2014, accessed June 6, 2015, http://displacement.mit.edu/syrian-urban-refugees-in-turkey-spatial-social-segregation/.

50 A. Lancashire, and B. Bayraktar, "Turkish refugee camps for Syrians set high standard," *Euronews*, September 9, 2015, accessed November 16, 2015, http://www.euronews.com/2015/09/09/turkish-refugee-camps-for-syrians-set-high-standard/.

51 "Evolution of Asylum Applications," *UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response*, EUROPE: Syrian Asylum Applications, accessed December 17, 2014, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/asylum.php.

Now considered a "migrant crisis," the United Nations estimates that more than 750,000 people had crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe by November 2015.[52] Thousands more have crossed by land, creating division within the EU on how to resettle these people. On the November 29, 2015, the EU and Turkey reached a deal to reduce the number of migrants entering Europe from Turkish territory. The EU committed to providing an initial €3 billion of resources to help Turkey. In response, Turkey agreed to fight smuggling networks in the country and to improve the situation of Syrians. Exact details on how Turkey would improve the position of Syrians in the country were left ominously vague.

52 *Refugee/Migrants Emergency Response- Mediterranean: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, UNHCR,* November 2015, accessed December 1, 2015, http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php.

ISTANBUL CASE STUDY

Since 2012, increasing numbers of Syrians have settled in Istanbul. The majority of these initial settlers were middle and business class Syrians who were attempting to run their business from afar or establish new lives abroad. It was not until 2013 that growing numbers of poorer Syrians became visible in urban areas and therefore attracted more attention from Turkish NGOs.[53] One reason for the increasing visibility of Syrians from 2013 onwards was not just due to their numbers but also to their structure. In contrast with other refugee groups, Syrians tended to migrate as family units with few Syrian children or individuals travelling alone. Prior to this, the demographic of refugees in Istanbul was primarily individual male Afghan, Iranians, and Iraqis who worked in the city's informal labor market to sustain themselves while they waited for their asylum applications to be processed. The majority of Syrians migrating to Istanbul have joined the ranks of this social enclave within the urban poor demographic. Istanbul now has the highest urban population of refugees in the country, with the Interior Ministry estimating 330,000 Syrians alone residing in the city in 2014.[54]

Syria had traditionally been a recipient rather than a producer of refugees. Similar to neighboring Lebanon and Jordan, Syria has hosted a large and permanent Palestinian refugee population. Since 2006, the country had also been hosting Iraqi refugees from the escalating sectarian violence in addition to a small number from Afghanistan and Somalia.[55] This may explain some general characteristics of Syrians in Turkey. While Syrians may be entitled to certain benefits compared with other refugee groups, they are largely ignorant of asylum processes, rights, and laws.[56] In contrast, Afghans and Iranians are well-informed about their rights when they visit NGO offices. For a long time, some Turkish NGOs found that their Syrian clients would not even acknowledge that they are refugees by saying, "We are not refugees; we are seeking humanitarian assistance."[57] Reluctance to identify as a refugee also emerged with the research of this report. Syrians from the middle and business class rejected being labeled as refugees, associating this status with the image of vulnerable people in camps. Similarly, the label of refugee was conspicuous by its absence among our interviewees. Rather, interviewees identified their needs and identity in Turkey in terms of human rights and dignity.

The fieldwork utilized qualitative research methods. This included interviews with a sample of Turkish NGOs working with Syrian refugees in Istanbul. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with over 11 people of different religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These included a Syrian woman[58]; two single Syrian men from Damascus based in Istanbul, one working for a Syrian NGO[59] and another for an international NGO[60]; a Syrian man from Damascus whose family lives in Istanbul and works for a Syrian organization[61]; and two branches of a multi-generational Kurdish family from Aleppo province who left for Europe at the end of the summer in 2015. Aside from the Kurdish family members, all interviewees were between the ages of 25 and 35 years old. The families from Aleppo province included a husband, wife, and toddler son (family 1),[62] as well as the husband's mother, two adult sisters, and two nephews under the age of 11 (family 2).[63] The wife's sister also contributed to the interviews. There were also other relatives, such as aunts and cousins, who had recently arrived in Turkey and were in the same area.

There were different reasons for interviewees to leave Syria. Some fled violence or the direct threat of violence from the regime. One sister from the Aleppo families experienced missile and rocket attacks in her neighborhood and witnessed snipers on some of the buildings. Others came because their families left or to work as activists. Most of the Aleppo family identified indirect threats as their motivation to leave, such as the deteriorating economic situation. Many of the adults

53 Turkish NGO personnel in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 12 and 30, 2015.

54 M. Çetinğuleç, "Syria's New Capital... Istanbul," *Al-Monitor*, September 14, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/09/turkey-syria-refugees-new-capital-istanbul.html#.

55 *2015 UNHCR country operations profile*.

56 Interviews with Turkish NGO personnel in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 12 and 30, 2015.

57 Ibid.

58 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015c.

59 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015b.

60 Interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015.

61 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015a.

62 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

63 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015b.

used to work in the city of Aleppo but returned to the security of their villages as the fighting and violence worsened. The longer they stayed, the more their money and resources diminished, eventually forcing them to leave and cross over to Turkey by foot in 2013.

All interviewees highlighted a number of problems and issues that they faced while trying to live in Turkey. These included discrimination, barriers to accessing banking, health, and education services as well as challenges in housing and work conditions. In the case of the Aleppo families, these were identified as push factors that eventually led them to travel to Europe.

A lack of documentation or legislation makes accessing basic services difficult if not impossible, even for Syrians who have legal privileges compared to other refugee groups. Without acceptable identity cards Syrians cannot legally pay for housing and often utilities such as electricity and gas. Electricity, internet, telephone, and heating among others are all provided by private companies in Turkey that require customers to set up individual accounts. Legally-accepted identity cards are a necessity, and even then some companies only accept Turkish customers fearing that remuneration is not guaranteed with a "foreigner." As such, utility accounts are often registered under the landlord or another citizen's name but used by the foreign resident. In some instances Syrians are able to pay for the bills themselves in cash by showing the invoices at the bank.[64]

Opening a bank account is often difficult. There is inconsistency in the application of procedures. While some banks claim to only require a passport to open an account, in practice they can easily reject individual applications on a whim.[65] One of the men from Damascus was able to open a bank account in 2013 but only after experiencing some difficulty.[66] It has since become even more challenging for Syrians to open an account, with banks often asking for extra documentation such as a residence permit, which is unavailable to most Syrians.[67] Faced with obstacles in holding a bank account due to insufficient documentation, discrimination, or even ignorance of its availability, urban refugees are more inclined to hold their cash-based wages in their homes, making them a target for criminality.

Housing regulations that require documentation such as proof of residence can make housing more inaccessible, expensive, and illegal. Often landlords will take a fixed amount of money from Syrian tenants that include money for rent and bills which are under the landlord's name.[68] This can lead to Syrians paying inflated prices for poor accommodation. The husband from family 1 succinctly summarizes his experience as follows:

> *Here we are living in one room... Here in this house we are living in, it suffers from humidity, and this is something that causes many diseases for my child at least. I cannot offer to rent or buy a house better than this house, which is already expensive. It will cost me more than I can offer. So the minimum limits of a normal life that keeps you safe and healthy is not available.*[69]

Access to education is similarly difficult, particularly for refugees in urban areas despite the easing of restrictions to allow Syrians with the simple government-issued ID cards to apply. One of the men from Damascus, despite being accepted for a master's degree in a Turkish university and having his documentation and undergraduate diploma recognized, was rejected by Turkey's Higher Education Authority (YÖK) twice.[70]

A report by Human Rights Watch in November 2015 reported that an estimated 485,000 Syrian refugee children in Turkey were not attending school.[71] The majority of these children were in urban areas. There was a 90 percent enrollment rate in the 25 government-run refugee camps, which represents just 13 percent of the Syrian school-aged population in Turkey. Outside of the camps, there are language barriers and economic pressures that lead some children to work and inconsistencies in the implementation of the law. Even when they entered school, the report found that Syrian children may face discrimination by school administrators or other students. The Turkish state has attempted to address some of these issues with Turkish language programs or an Arabic-language curriculum, but these are mainly focused on the southeast of the country and have not yet expanded to recognize the shift in geographic demographics.

64 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul December 16, 2015a.

65 Interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015.

66 Interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015.

67 Interviewin discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, December 16, 2015a.

68 Interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015.

69 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

70 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015a.

71 "When I Picture My Future, I See Nothing': Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey," *Human Rights Watch*, November 8, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/08/turkey-400000-syrian-children-not-school.

Education is an important issue highlighted by all interviewees. The wife of the first Aleppo family had trained as a teacher in Syria and was concerned for the educational future for her three-year-old son:

> *Syrian children are not studying for three, four years (and are) away from school—what would happen to all those children? They don't have access to education. I would be so happy if I could go back to teaching children, which is very important.*[72]

Her sister-in-law also expressed similar sentiments. Despite having two school-age boys under 11 years old and being in the country for two years, neither of her children attended school. This made their presence in Turkey untenable. She framed her husband's presence in Europe with regard to her children's education: "He had to escape because {we} have children, they need access to education. He moved to Denmark; he's waiting for asylum."[73] Education and the importance the family placed on it were also used to contrast the differences they saw between Turkey and their home in Syria:

> *I remember the children in Syria were always going home and forced to study. Our time in school, you can't see students playing in the street when they're home. Here, you see students playing so much in the street.*[74]

Problems with access to health care have also been highlighted. Despite being guaranteed access to health services under the 2014 Law on Foreigners, Syrians and NGOs working with them have expressed difficulties with the system. Aside from the obvious language barriers, there are also bureaucratic issues and institutional discrimination. First of all, refugees receive an identity card for the area in which they are registered, and they can only access services such as healthcare in that area. This means that if an individual entered Turkey near Hatay and registered there, they could only legally access services in that area even if they moved to Istanbul years later. Unless it is an emergency, Syrians will be rejected unless they make an appointment to visit a hospital.[75] One sister from the Aleppo family told of being rejected when they tried to receive care at a hospital. There is also inconsistency in the application and acceptance of Syrians by health workers, even when they do make an appointment. Turkish citizens or foreigners with residency cards will be given priority over Syrians no matter their number in line.

Work and ensuring reliable pay is a primary concern for refugees in Turkey, especially given that there is no welfare system or financial support provided to refugees. This is a particular challenge that makes urban refugees more vulnerable given that they are outside the amenities provided by refugee camps such as accommodation and food. Turkey has a large informal labor market which some Turkish NGOs have highlighted as being a paradoxical positive and negative force for undocumented workers and refugees.[76] On the positive side, the informal sector has ensured that Syrian refugees can find paid work. However, the circumstances and reliability of this payment is placed solely in the hands of individual employers.

Our interviews offered contrasting experiences in this regard. Both the husband of Family 1 and his sister from Family 2 work in the informal labor market. Despite long hours of work, the husband explains that there is no guarantee of reimbursement:

> *We are working from 8am to 8pm, then I have to work some extra hours—they force me to do that. And they pay less; they can just fire me, not like the Turkish citizens. I can work these hours. I accept it, but maybe less hours with this less money they are paying (me). They are not paying me equal to Turkish citizens. To work with some dignity—hours which at least permit you to come see your child. They always threaten us that if we are absent one or two hours that we will be fired.*[77]

In contrast, the Syrians working in NGOs were treated as valued employees and paid regularly. They work in Istanbul; however, due to their Syrian citizenship they cannot receive a work permit in Turkey. As such, their work status is illegal, even for those working with registered Syrian NGOs. As one of the men stated, "Well until now I am depending for work on Syrian NGOs. So until now I didn't take any job from {a} Turkish company. As you know, it is difficult to find work in a company. My specialty is finance."[78]

72 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

73 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015b.

74 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

75 Turkish NGO personnel in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 30, 2015.

76 Turkish NGO personnel in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 12, 2015.

77 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

78 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015b.

Work is one of the defining issues in the interviewees' position in Turkey. As the sister in Family 2 stated,

> *If I get better chance of work here, that keeps my dignity and... better to survive conditions, because I cannot go back to Syria and start from new again... For me probably, if I get a better chance, I stay here.*[79]

Like in all social groups, class and social mobility matter in the context of Syrian experiences. Poor Syrian refugees who may not have marketable skills or language abilities often face the same challenges as other undocumented workers. Even well-educated Syrians, such as doctors or engineers, cannot practice their profession. The construction and textile industry is the largest demographic of undocumented labor available for refugees such as Syrians. Such work is often physically intensive and dangerous. If an adult or parent is injured, they are unable to work. Turkish NGOs are increasingly seeing a high level of child labor within the Syrian community.[80] This is not because parents do not want their children to have an education but out of necessity, particularly if a parent is injured or disabled or if one salary is not enough to cover their expenses. NGOs report that it is common for a family to send some of their younger children to school but the older to work.[81]

Of the Syrians interviewed for this report, all expressed some psychological stress related to the social and economic challenges of living in Istanbul. This ranges from the frustration of daily challenges of the Turkish bureaucracy to shifts in family dynamics due to work-related stress and a lack of social support. All members of the Aleppo families lamented the loss of their pre-war communities and linked the pressures of trying to survive in Istanbul as putting pressure on family relationships and causing tension. The adults of the family from Aleppo province all expressed regret regarding ruptured lives from their inability to work in their professions as teachers or tailors, to their dislocation and the security of their former pre-war communities.

Discrimination was also expressed as a source of tension throughout engagement with Turkish services and society, from their rising rent costs and accessing services to personal interactions. The wife of family 1 told of being mocked by a Turkish girl who was designing her veil.[82] As Kurds from Aleppo, they also felt that they might find some solidarity from Turkish-Kurds, but the families felt more discriminated against arguing that in their experience they were more likely not to be paid if they worked for a Kurdish boss.[83]

The permanency of their exile and the instability and temporality of their legal status and rights in Turkey are the underlying issues highlighted in these interviewees. The challenges faced by Syrians are summarized by one of the Damascus men as follows:

> *Can I travel using it [government ID]? No. Can I open a bank account? Maybe. Can I go to a hospital? Four months queue. Can I go to school? It depends. Can I rent a house legally? No. Can I register my bills? No. You can't establish a life like this.*[84]

All interviewees for this report acknowledged the long-term nature of their exile from Syria, with some even believing it will be permanent. Almost every interviewee had also considered moving to Europe to escape the difficulties they faced by permanently staying in Turkey. One of the men from Damascus had twice tried to go to Europe:

> *I tried twice to cross to Greece. The second time we were thrown into the sea, and we were rescued and brought back to the Turkish side. It was horrible... Smugglers are the worst people ever. That's why in the short-term I will stay in Turkey. Except if we have another chance to travel outside. In the long-term I don't think I will stay here especially if the things become better in Syria.*[85]

In discussions with the first Aleppo family, they expressed an interest in even going to a refugee camp in Turkey. They had heard that there are schools and housing in the camps, which would at least provide some of their needs.[86] It is within this context that the families from Aleppo discussed the difficulties in Turkey and their thoughts on migrating to Europe:

> *...whether it is America or European countries, because whether they like it or not, they [Syrians] are*

79 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015b.

80 Turkish NGO personnel in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 30, 2015.

81 Turkish NGO personnel in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 12 and 30, 2015.

82 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

83 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a and b.

84 Interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015.

85 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015a.

86 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

going to those places. They can facilitate for them. But why they should enhance it [helping projects] for Syrians in Turkey when they don't want to stay here? They're all, as you know, willing to move to other countries. It's not helpful—the war is not stopping, Syrians don't like it here.[87]

A few weeks after this interview, all eight members of the Aleppo families interviewed and their other relatives left Turkey for Europe. The other interviewees are staying in Turkey for the moment.

In order to take advantage of better rights, one of the Damascus men is applying for a residence permit rather than simply the ID card provided to Syrians. To do so, he applied for a new two-year passport from Syria, which cost over 400 USD, and saved the 6,000 USD needed in his Turkish bank account. He was also forced to pay a significant fine in order to leave Turkey as the system treated him like any other foreigner who had overstayed their visa. He left Turkey for two days at the end of December prior to the implementation of the Syrian third-country visa requirement that began on January 8, 2016. He re-entered with a new passport to apply anew for a resident permit simply as a "foreigner."[88]

87 Interview in discussion with the author, Gaziosmanpaşa, Istanbul, July 8, 2015a.

88 Telephone interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, January 1, 2016.

LUKEWARM SUPPORT FOR SYRIANS IN URBAN AREAS

The Turkish government has mobilized some initiatives to address urban refugees. This includes the e-food card, which allows Syrians to buy food from contracted shops. It is operational in over 11 of the 25 refugee camps in the country and has been extended to Syrian refugees in urban and peripheral areas in Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa.[89] In 2012, the Higher Education Board of Turkey declared that Syrian students could be accepted into seven[90] universities in the southeast of the country if they knew enough Turkish.[91] In 2013, it was announced that Syrian students with the proper documentation could enter all Turkish universities as undergraduates. These urban-focused state programs are geographically limited to the Southeast and the cities immediately surrounding camp areas. They have not been expanded to the rest of the country to cities such as Adana, Ankara, Konya, Izmir, and Istanbul, which are now hosting significant numbers of refugees.

Similarly, INGOs have focused all their attention on camp-based refugees in Turkey or in the areas around the camps. Despite the launch of a UNHCR policy on urban refugees in 2009, the majority of UN programs in Turkey have been camp-based or geographically limited to urban areas near camps. The funding programs of INGOs have failed to recognize and act accordingly to the growing issue of refugees in cities and towns across the country. One reason for this is not just that urban refugees may not fit the agenda of some INGOs but also that they are geographically limited in their mobility. The Turkish government is reluctant to allow INGOs to work in cities such as Istanbul or Ankara. INGOs are instead given permission to operate by province. As a result of this, advocacy and support for the estimated 300,000 Syrians in Istanbul is left to a small number of Turkish organizations who are providing front-line services and one or two active municipalities.

Among others, the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD), the Human Resource Development Foundation (IKGV), the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, and some smaller scale relief projects by Kimse Yok Mu and Small Projects Istanbul are providing support to Syrian refugees in urban areas. Many of these programs received funding from INGOs such as the UNHCR and the International Organization of Migration.

Municipalities

In consultation with the governor's office of Istanbul and the relevant national agencies, Istanbul's local municipalities are responsible for and oversee a number of services in their vicinity from infrastructure and maintenance to health, religious, and water services.[92] Of the 40 municipalities in Istanbul metropolitan area, only nine host significant Syrian communities. These include but are not exclusive to Fatih, Bahçelievler, Başakşehir, Gaziosmanpaşa, Esenyurt, Küçükçekmece, Kadiköy, Sultanbeyli, and Ümraniye. Of the 12 municipalities[93] that were contacted for this report, only four were able to provide information on Syrians in their district.

In Eyüp, the municipality has encountered an estimated 500 families of mostly Kurdish and Turkman background.[94] They counted the Syrians by "hane," meaning house or dwelling; but, given that there are often two or more families in one place, this is just a fraction of the actual number. The Gaziosmanpaşa municipality has tried to provide ad-hoc assistance to those refugees that have directly approached them, but they have no records on the numbers living in their district.[95] As of December 28, 2015, Sultanbeyli has registered 16,274 Syrian individuals with the municipality, though they did not provide any information on any services or support they might provide.[96] Finally, the Esenyurt municipality has been keeping records of

89 World Food Program, "Helping Those Most In Need: Turkey Hosts & Supports Syrian Refugees," *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, October 29, 2015, accessed November 26, 2015, http://www.trust.org/item/20151029155208-x6lix/?source=search.

90 These seven universities include Çukurova University in Adana, Gaziantep University, Harran University in Şanlıurfa, Kilis 7 Aralık University, Mustafa Kemal University in Hatay, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, and Mersin University.

91 "Number of Syrian students in Turkish universities quadruples," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 27, 2015, accessed September 15, 2015, http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_number-of-syrian-students-in-turkish-universities-quadruples_392069.html.

92 These include infrastructure and maintenance, such as building, repairing and cleaning roads, collecting rubbish, distribution of water and sewage facilities; adjudicating on local construction projects and cheap housing; administering business licenses; education such as preschools and libraries; health and religious facilities; transportation services in the local area; and cultural activities.

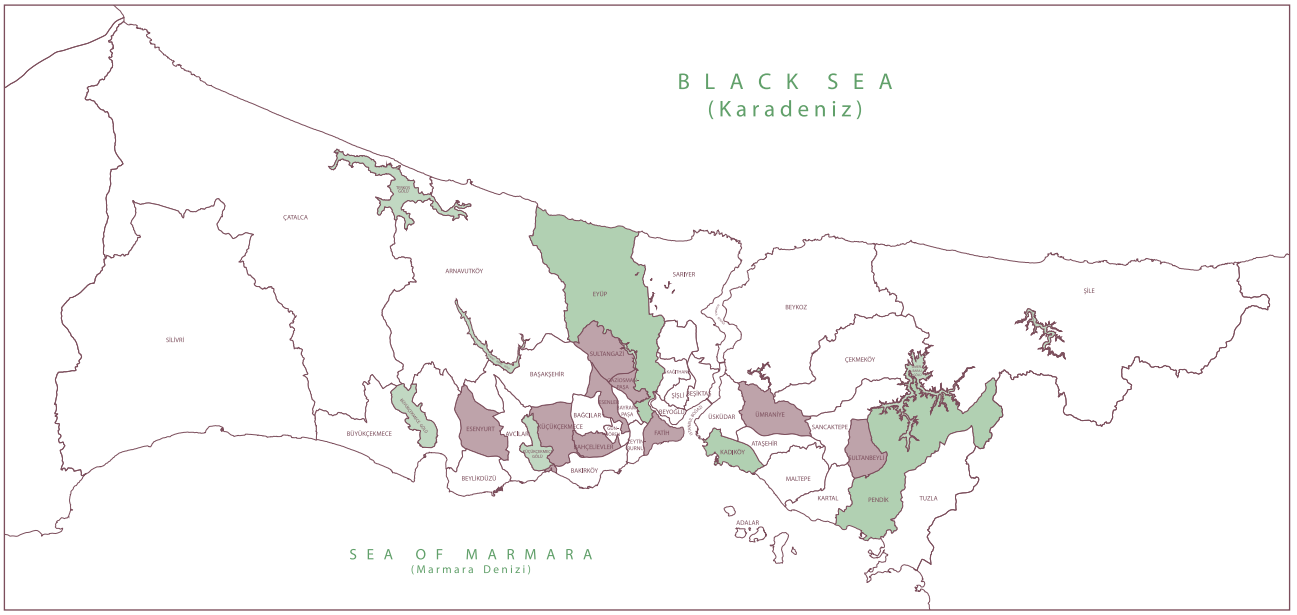
93 Between November 5-20 the following municipalities were contacted multiple times: Bahçelievler, Başakşehir, Beyoğlu, Esenyurt, Eyüp, Fatih, Gaziosmanpaşa, Kadiköy, Sariyer, Ümraniye and Üsküdar. Sultanbeyli Municipality was contacted on January 8, 2016.

94 Author's telephone call to Eyüp Municipality, November 12, 2015.

95 Author's telephone call to Gaziosmanpaşa Municipality, November 12, 2015.

96 Author's telephone call to Sultanbeyli Municipality, January 8, 2016.

Figure 4 Municipalities with significant Syrian populations[97]



Syrian refugees in their district since 2013.[98] There are about 60,000 Syrians in all neighborhoods of Esenyurt and 9,500 registered families. But again, there is usually only one person who is registered per household, and it is not uncommon to have three to four families live in one dwelling. The municipality provides a variety of support, from distributing heating systems or secondhand clothes that are left at the municipalities to organizing funerals. The municipality also noted that Syrians have started to open their own small businesses in textiles and as hairdressers. Given that they do not work legally or have business permits, these businesses would unlikely fall into the tax rebate of the municipality.

Inconsistency exists in the position, knowledge, and response of the various municipal governments in Istanbul regarding Syrian populations. Some municipalities such as Fatih and Üsküdar have asked for written information requests. Meanwhile, Ümraniye, Kadiköy, Sariyer, and Bahçelievler did not have information on refugees and alternatively suggested that the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD), the Istanbul governor's office, or the police might be able to provide information on Syrians in their districts. Information on refugees in Istanbul is even more difficult to obtain from the Governors' Office of Istanbul, which was contacted for this report. It could not provide any information, instead stating that the data is held by the General Management. Information requests must be written and submitted to the Interior Ministry for assessment.[99] This illustrates the problems of transparency and information within the maze of Turkish bureaucracy. It also reflects a general trend that saw the Ministry of Interior in April 2015 issue a directive that requires academics to receive permission from the relevant ministries prior to conducting any research on Syrians in Turkey.[100]

This problem in the harmonization and communication of information and laws is equally problematic for all refugees including Syrians. One of the men interviewed from Damascus summarizes his experience: "Every time a law changes here about the residence permit or ID it is changing very fast and we don't know what we have to do...they don't really announce it. It is very difficult to find out."[101]

97 The purple districts have the highest density of Syrian residents with significant numbers also in the green areas, as described by informants. The number or scope of Syrian communities in the white areas is not available. This map was compiled in consultation with each interviewee and through the following resources: A. Güner, "Istanbul'da Yaşayan Suriyeliler," *Islam and Ihsan*, September 3, 2015, accessed December 15, 2015, http://www.islamveihsan.com/istanbulda-yasayan-suriyeliler.html;

98 Author's telephone call to Esenyurt Municipality, November 12, 2015.

99 Author's telephone call to the Governor's Office of Istanbul, December 18, 2015.

100 B. Kayaoğlu, "Turkey restricts academic research on Syrian refugees," *Al-Monitor*, May 27, 2015, accessed December 20, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/turkey-syria-government-restricts-academic-research.html#.

101 Interview in discussion with the author, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, December 16, 2015b.

This problem in harmonization and communication results in rules and laws being applied inconsistently from place to place. For example in September 2015, the Turkish Interior Ministry announced the prohibition of Syrian's internal mobility in an attempt to stop them massing at the borders and coasts to get to Europe. According to the declaration, Syrians would not be able to leave the area that they were registered in.[102] The police, however, have inconsistently enforced this declaration. These issues in inter-agency communication are also problematic for refugees. The most recent change, the implementation of a visa for Syrians coming from third-countries, was announced on December 30, 2015 and implemented on January 8, 2016. This makes the situation for Syrians insecure and untenable when decisions regarding their mobility are based on individual or district preferences.

102 "Türkiye, Suriyelilere sert kurallar koyuyor," *BBC Türkçe*, September 23, 2015, accessed November 29, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/09/150923_turkiye_suriyeliler.

CONCLUSION

Acknowledgement of the numbers and position of Syrians and other refugees in urban areas in Turkey is important. Urban areas are susceptible to unique challenges that differ from camps and rural areas. Sufficient data and policies are needed to accurately map and provide analysis of urban sensitive areas that may be more at risk for natural disasters, inter-community tension, development, and infrastructure. This research has outlined the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in urban areas due to the impact that they have had on the social fabric of some areas of Turkey. This ranges from the trend of Turkish men taking Syrian women as second wives in the Southeast to the large presence of Syrians in the informal labor market in Gaziantep and Istanbul. Syrians are not the only refugee group in Turkey, and many Iraqis and Iranians, among others, face worse.

It is easier to identify the numbers and needs of refugees in camps, unlike in urban areas where governments and municipalities may not even be willing to acknowledge the scale or number of refugees. Further, there is no single registry of Syrian refugees. AFAD is responsible for only the refugee camps and registration within them. Until 2014 and the establishment of the General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM), AFAD was trying to register Syrians in urban areas around the camps. Now, Syrians register at local police stations.[103] These different registration procedures and locations have not yet been fully aligned. Providing support for urban refugees is therefore not just a resource problem but also a bureaucratic obstacle between INGOs, the national government, their agencies, and local municipalities. Given the many local, national, and international actors involved in urban areas, communication and cooperation are often problems.[104] There is also general disinterest in Syrian urban refugees among some actors.

In general, refugee camps host the most vulnerable of displaced societies while those in the cities reflect a broader representative of the sending country. These are people that may be more resilient as they are seeking ways for self-sustainability rather than people in camps or rural areas who may need to be at sites for humanitarian aid. For Turkey this seems to be an inverse trend. The camps are increasingly supporting self-sustainability and resilience[105] while a lack of legislation and fundamental temporality are making life more unsustainable for urban refugees.

The continued emphasis on camp-based refugees or the increasingly prominent stereotype of Syrians begging on the streets of Turkey's cities[106] is misleading and ignores reality. The problem for many front line organizations and government offices is that Syrians in urban areas are not a humanitarian issue. Most of them do not require direct assistance. Rather they pose a development and legislative challenge. The overt focuses on humanitarian approaches to urban refugees ignores those who are doing well on their own, such as the man from Damascus, and does not consider if such people either need or want such direct assistance. All interviewees for this report were resilient and independent. They did not want or need humanitarian aid or special privileges. They only wanted rights.

There needs to be harmonization and clear communication of the rights governing Syrians so that there is a standardized response from all state and local agencies. Syrians need to be incorporated into existing residency and legal systems that will provide permanency and rights rather than create parallel ones that will exclude them and lead to inter-community antagonism. At the very least, expanding greater rights to Syrians, even if it is only at the base level such as authorizing Syrians to apply for a residence permit, would allow them to open bank accounts, register for utilities under their name, secure legal housing, and enter the school system like any other legally registered foreigner in Turkey. This would benefit the country by expanding the tax system to a wider constituency.

There is no easy solution to the challenges posed. Due to the legislative system imposed on them, most Syrians, whether they work in the textile industry or in NGOs, do so illegally. While there has been a decrease in wages and a loss of jobs for Turks in areas with notable Syrian populations such as Gaziantep, this has only been in some industries. This new workforce has also led to an economic revival in some sectors, with Syrians establishing their own business and expanding the consumer market.[107]

103 Interview in discussion with the author, Istanbul, October 15, 2015.

104 Crisp, "Displacement in Urban Areas."

105 K.B. Kanat, and K. Ustun, "Turkey's Syrian Refugees; Towards Integration," *SETA Foundation*, 2015, accessed October 29, 2015, http://setav.org/.

106 Çetinğuleç, "Syria's New Capital."

107 "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey," *ORSAM*, Report No. 195, January 2015, accessed July 15, 2015, http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/anasayfa.aspx.

On January 11, 2016, Minister for European Affairs Volkan Bozkir announced that draft regulations allowing Syrians to work had been adopted.[108] If enacted this regulation would allow the legal employment of Syrians but limit their number in a single company to just 10 percent of the work force. Syrians would be able to apply for a work permit six months after receiving their temporary identity cards but would only be able to legally work in the provinces in which they are officially registered. Furthermore, the draft regulation does not specify the guidelines or process for determining who does or does not get a work permit.

Even if work permits were to be provided, this would not automatically solve the unequal payment problem for most refugees given the large informal labor market in Turkey. Neither would providing work permits alone lead to the acknowledgement of the professional qualifications of some refugees such as doctors or engineers. The problems of the labor market access are issues of legislation and enforcement. If officials really want to address the fundamental issue of informal labor, they would need to put in place aggressive policies to punish employers who employ workers illegally, therefore, denying the state significant tax revenues.

Although the mass migration of Syrians to Turkey may seem like an incomprehensible social problem, this is not the first time that Turkey has faced such issues, though on a smaller scale. In 1989, Turkey allowed 300,000 Bulgarian Turks to cross its border. More than half of these people settled permanently in Turkey with all the rights and privileges of citizens. Turks viewed these people as foreigners even with their shared language and ethnicity. Despite having legal work permits as citizens, in the initial years they were paid less than their Anatolian brethren and local citizens lost jobs in favor of the cheaper employees.[109] Within a few years, however, this trend had stabilized as the market readjusted. Bulgarian Turks, like other citizens, worked in various industries; some re-qualified in their respective professions, and others opened businesses. In the long term, refugees can become self-reliant economic agents, particularly in urban settings. The market will again realign in response to Syrians legally established and working in Turkey.

The fundamental problem of temporality versus permanency remains. Syrians will not stay in Turkey if they have no guarantee of a future there. The absence of legal recognition translates into multiple limitations in the lives of urban refugees. The temporary visa provided to Syrians and the problems associated with it regarding discrimination, housing, work, documentation and access to services such as healthcare, education, and utilities prevent them from establishing stability in Turkey and therefore staying in the country. The family of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler washed up on a Turkish beach in September 2015, was not just fleeing the violence in Syria: They were also fleeing their situation in Turkey.[110] Many more in the same situation have died since then. Despite the efforts of the EU and Turkish authorities, many more will continue to risk the dangerous journey unless these fundamental issues are addressed.

108 E. Gurses, and M. Ozkan, "Turkey plans to introduce work permits for Syrian refugees, minister says," *Reuters*, January 11, 2016, accessed January 11, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-turkey-idUSKCN0UP0QP20160111.

109 Parla, "Labor Migration."

110 A. Withnall, "Aylan Kurdi's story: How a small Syrian child came to be washed up on a beach in Turkey," *Independent*, September 3, 2015, accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/.

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